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K'UNG SHANG-JEN:
The Peach Blossom Fan
Translated by Chen Shih-hsiang and
Harold Acton, with the collaboration
of Cyril Birch
310pp. University of California Press.
\$9.50. (Paperback, £2.80).
530 029 283

With the possible exception of the
Emperors of Japan, who trace their
ancestry from the Sun Goddess
Amaterasu, the heirs of Confucius
must have the longest pedigree in the
world. A great many of them, as
might be expected, were neophytes;
but a surprising number of them
were not. They include the great
scholar K'ung Ying-ta in the
seventeenth century and Chiang Kai-
shek's brother-in-law, the banker
H. H. K'ung, in the twentieth. Perhaps
the most interesting of them all was the
playwright K'ung Shang-jen, a descen-
dant of the Sage in the sixteenth
generation who wrote the popular
historical drama *The Peach Blossom*

Fan.
K'ung Shang-jen was born in
1644, three years after the collapse
of the Ming restoration in Nanking,
which is the subject of his play.
History books date the end of the
Ming dynasty and the beginning of
the Ch'ing from the proclamation in
Peking of the young Manchu prince
Fulin as Emperor of China in
October 1644. Six months before
that date the city had fallen to the
rebel army of Li Tzu-ch'eng, and the
thirty-three-year-old Ming emperor
Ch'ang-chien, abandoned by most of
his court, had hanged himself from a
sophisticated beech on Coal Hill, the ar-
tificial pavilion-capped "mountain"
world of the imperial palace. The
young prince had summoned to his aid,
caught between the rebel army of Li
Tzu-ch'eng and the Manchu army
under Dorgon, which had been
driven, vulture-like, out of Mac-
ao by the news of Peking's fall, had
surrendered to the latter and col-
laborated with it in fighting Li Tzu-
ch'eng. Dorgon's installation of his
young nephew as the first emperor of
a new dynasty in Peking took place
less than four months after his troops
took possession of the city.

If fact it was several more months
before Manchu control over even a
substantial part of China was estab-
lished; indeed, on the fringes of the
Ming restoration continued for
years in the south-west until 1659,
when the unfortunate Prince of Kuei
was later extradited and, boy-
strang) fled with his entourage into
Burma; in the south-east until as late
as 1663, when a grandson of the gal-
lant pirate king Chinggis surrendered
to the Manchu. For most Chinese, how-
ever, the surrender in June 1645 of
Nanking, where a new imperial court
had been set up by the Prince of Fu,
was the distinguished any serious
loss they may have entertained of
a Ming revival, and it is the history
of this short-lived Nanking court
which makes the background of
K'ung's play.

Nanking ("Southern Capital") had
a symbolic significance for the Ming
dynasty. For one thing it had been
the strategic base and later the
administrative centre of the Found-
ing Emperor of the dynasty. (It was
not until the latter part of the third
emperor Yung-lo's reign that the
Ming capital moved from Nanking to
Peking.) But, more than that, it was
the seat of Loyang by the Hsiao in
AD 311, Nanking had been the cap-
ital of a succession of southern dynas-
ties, which the flame of Chinese
culture burned on, unquelled by
Mongol contamination. Except for
the brief period of Mongol rule (and the
Ming were no exception), the
Ming were the only Chinese under foreign
rule. The Ming were expected to
be a more progressive and barbarian
dynasty than the Han, and was a period
in which a highly

cultivated native Chinese adminis-
tration would be left in possession of
the South.

The Manchus themselves seem ini-
tially to have expected such an out-
come of their aggression. They were,
after all, (or believed themselves to
be) descendants of the Jüeh-shi
"Chin" dynasty who had shared
China in the twelfth century with the
Southern Sung. Dorgon's offer to the
embassy sent from Nanking in 1644
to leave the South unmolested in
return for some sort of token sub-
mission may well have been sincere
and was presumably made with such
historical precedents in mind. It was
the rapid collapse of the Nanking
regime in the following year which
encouraged a larger ambition and led
on to the conquest of all China.

The invading Manchu army of
1644 was not a large one, scarcely
more numerous than the horde of
eunuchs attached to the palace city
in Peking. China in the mid-
seventeenth century was far and
away the greatest, richest, most
populous country in the world. The
Ming court had Western advisers
who could both make and import
cannon and fire guns to fire them.
What had reduced this great
and powerful nation to a state of
such degeneracy that a parcel of bar-
barians from beyond the Wall could
easily both of its capitals in little
more than a twelvemonth, and each
time without a battle? Patriot schol-
ars like the great Wang Fu-ch'ien
spent decades in their remote moun-
tain retreats pondering the historical,
political, philosophical causes of this
demoralization. K'ung Shang-jen
thought not even born when these
events occurred, heard much about
them from an uncle who had lived
for some years with another relation
who had been a member of the
Nanking court, and was equally
obsessed by them. His play, pon-
dered, researched, written and
rewritten over a period of many
years, may be thought of as the ar-
tistic equivalent of the historical-
philosophical treatises of Wang Fu-
ch'ien.

That this obsessive interest in
recent history should have found
expression in a dramatic form
resembling *opera buffa* may at first
seem somewhat strange. It could be
explained in terms of aptitude: a
Chinese playwright had to be able to
write verse libretti and to select his
own times, and K'ung Shang-jen was
both a prolific—almost too pro-
lific—poet and a competent musician;
or it could be explained on political
grounds: the "Southern" type of
drama (as in the case of the main
devoted to poetical and sentimental
themes and therefore less likely than
any other form of literature to
excite the suspicions of the Manchu
authorities, always murderously sen-
sitive to real or imagined slights.

In fact, neither of these explana-
tions is necessary. For all his mul-
titudinous interests—besides poetry
and music already mentioned, these
included classical studies, religious
ceremonial, the design and manu-
facture of ritual vessels, strategic
studies and the collection of anti-
ques—K'ung was a born dramatist
and would have written plays where-
ever or whenever he had been born in
whatever dramatic form happened to
be available. It came naturally to him
to give whatever most interested him
a dramatic expression. When, in pur-
suit of his favourite hobby, he
acquired a very rare Tang musical
instrument—a sort of fiddle—he
wrote a play about it. In *The Peach*
Blossom Fan he gave dramatic ex-
pression not only to his obsessive
interest in recent historical events,
but to his other interests as well:
poetry, music, drama and ritual. He
has poets, musicians and a dramatist
among his principal characters, and
we see them both discussing and
practising their arts; and K'ung
Shang-jen puts himself in the play in
the likeness of an aged Master of
Ceremonies, calling out the direc-
tions to participants in an elaborate
ritual, just as he must have done at
his Ancestor's birthplace in Shan-
tung.

Until he was in his mid-thirties, it
was as a semi-recluse in the moun-
tains not far from his birthplace that
K'ung Shang-jen spent most of his
life—a life, he tells us in his preface
to *The Peach Blossom Fan*, which
afforded him ample leisure to think
about his projected play, a first draft
of which appears to have been com-
pleted by 1684. He had hesitated to
begin writing it, the preface tells us,
because he doubted whether he had
sufficient knowledge and experience
to avoid the risk of falsifying history.
This emphasis on historical accu-
racy is typical of K'ung Shang-jen,
who must be the only Chinese play-
wright ever to furnish his play with a
bibliography. True, his definition of
historical accuracy seems to have
been a somewhat elastic one: he
must, for example, have known that
his hero, whom he has ending his
days in modest retreat, in real life
took an examination qualifying him
for employment under the Manchus;
and a too literal-minded interpreta-
tion of a rhetorical expression com-
monly used in Chinese obituary
notices gives rise to a ridiculous
scene in which a loyal Ming general
in which a loyal Ming general
impresses his virtuous troops by
weeping actual tears of blood. But
apart from these theatrical distor-
tions and exaggerations, it remains
true that for a dramatist, K'ung
Shang-jen is accurate and remarkably
well-informed.

Opportunities to enlarge the
"knowledge and experience" his play

required occurred after his "dis-
covery" by the Emperor K'ang-hsi in
the following year. K'ang-hsi stepped
at Confucius's birthplace in Shan-
tung on his way back to Peking from
the first of his Southern Tours in
1685. The Tours were elaborate
exercises in what we should now-
days call public relations, in which
the Manchu emperor was anxious to
show himself benevolent towards his
Chinese subjects and appreciative of
their culture. It was therefore essen-
tial that he should visit the Confu-
cian shrine if he was going to be in
that area. K'ung Shang-jen was
commanded to lecture to the
emperor on selected Confucian texts
and to act as his guide on a con-
ducted tour of the sights. In the
detailed account he later published
of these events he observed that
K'ung-hsi stayed longer at each of
the sacred places and asked more
questions about it than any other
emperor had done in the whole of
recorded history. He also noted,
thriftily Confucian that he was, when
the emperor was making his koto at
the Sage's tomb, that there was a
conspicuous daru in the lining of his
robe.

An outcome of this encounter was
K'ung's appointment first to a pro-
fessorship in Peking and then, in
1686, to a post which he occupied
for several years in River Conser-
vancy in the area north of Nanking.
The job proved a disappointing one.
Owing to a difference of opinion
among the experts, flood control was
at a standstill while commissions car-
ried out surveys and made reports
and the planners intrigued and
struggled against each other in Pek-
ing. As time went by many of those
in subordinate positions drifted away,
and in one of his poems K'ung
Shang-jen discursively observed
that he was almost the only one left
in his office. He could visit Nanking,
however, and Yangchow, and see the
famous sights, and even get to know
some of the elderly survivors of '45,
one of whom appears at a character
in his play. In 1689 he returned to
his teaching post in the Peking
Academy in which he continued for
another four years until his appoint-
ment to a Secretaryship in the Board
of Revenue in 1694.

He was still in this last appoint-
ment in 1699 when the third and
final draft of *The Peach Blossom Fan*
was completed and at once acclaimed
by those who were fortunate enough
to read it. "Princes and persons of
quality had copies made of it," he
tells us somewhat complacently in his
preface. "The price of paper was said
to have gone up as a consequence."
Even K'ang-hsi heard of the new
play, and K'ung Shang-jen found
himself answering a midnight call
from the Palace commanding him to
supply a copy for imperial perusal
forthwith. His own manuscript was

lost on loan and he had to borrow a
copy from a friend. Some months
later, at a private performance in the
house of a high-ranking official, he
was gratified to observe several
elderly ex-officials of the previous
dynasty weeping audibly as they
watched his play.

Although it was to be another
eight years before it appeared in
print, the play was undoubtedly a
great success; but it cost its author
his job. K'ang-hsi always professed
to think highly of *The Peach Blossom*
Fan (in the same spirit, perhaps,
as that in which his father Fulin had
insisted on having a patriotic Ming
song played for him while he dined);
but the fact remains that shortly after
the midnight call from the Palace
K'ung Shang-jen was relieved of his
post at the Board of Revenue and as
long as he lived was never again to
hold public office. A mystery sur-
rounds his dismissal, but dismissal it
certainly was, since his own K'ung
relations later spoke of his returning
home "in disgrace".

Of course, there is no anti-Manchu
sentiment in the play: except in the
Prologue and Epilogue, in each of
which very respectful reference is
made to the reigning emperor, no
Manchu is so much as mentioned in
it. Nor were stage expressions of
loyalist sentiment such as occur in
Scene 32, where most of the cast are
shown on their knees in front of the
spirit-tablet of the royal martyr,
Ch'ung-chen, likely to have given
serious offence. The Manchu rulers,
in common with other autocrats,
liked to see respect paid to their
predecessors. If K'ang-hsi was really
offended by this play—and the fact is
still disputed by Chinese scholars—it
would have been at the controversial
nature of the subject rather than
K'ung's treatment of it. Political
activity of any kind was obnoxious to
the Manchu emperors, particularly
factionalism of the kind so vividly
portrayed in *The Peach Blossom*
Fan. Probably he would have
thought K'ung unsound, if not actu-
ally dangerous, merely for having
chosen such a theme.

The Peach Blossom Fan is a long
and complex drama (forty scenes and
more than thirty characters). It is a
love-story—that of the young scholar
Hou Fang-yü and the Nanking
courtesan Li Hsiang-shün—set
against a broad historical back-
ground: the rise and fall of the
Prince of Fu's short-lived, imperial
restoration in Nanking. Almost all
the characters, down to quite minor
ones, are based on real people.
Except for the Epilogue, the whole
action takes place in little more than
two years (1643-1645) and nearly all
in Nanking. To understand it, some
prior knowledge of Ming history,
particularly of the last two or three
decades of it, is indispensable.

Chinese, like Russian, absolutism
tended to get worse rather than
better as time went by. The office of
Prime Minister, so important under
the urbane and civilized Sung, was
abolished by the paranoid Founder
of the Ming dynasty. He was to be
his own Prime Minister; his ministers
were to be trembling lackeys, wait-
ing in almost all important matters
on his decision. But during the three
centuries which followed the Ming
imperial line became so effete that
some emperors never appeared in
court at all for years on end. Under
these circumstances the palace
eunuchs, who alone had access to the
emperor when he was "inside",
began to arrogate to themselves
many of the imperial powers,
expanding in the course of time into
a huge palace bureaucracy num-
bering tens of thousands and reinforcing
their power with a wide-ranging se-
cret service, in whose dungeons and
torture-chambers members of the
Confucian mandarin class who craved
them were liable to disappear.

Against this menace the scholar-
gentry, particularly the "Southern"
type, by the end of the sixteenth

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them were liable to disappear.

Poem

The lights glow
What will happen next?
Night has fallen
The rain stops
What will happen next?
Night will deepen
He does not know
What I will say to him
When he has gone
I'll have to work in his ear
And say what I was about to say
At the meeting about to happen
Which has now taken place
But he said nothing
At the meeting about to take place
It is only now that he turns and smiles
And whispers
I do not know
What will happen next?

Harold Pinter

No room at the top

By Robert Blake

PATRICK COSGRAVE

R. A. Butler: An English Life
167pp. Quercus. £6.95.
0 7043 2258 7

Biographies of living people, for obvious reasons, seldom come off. Papers one not available, perspective is difficult and deflection is a danger. Oddly enough, two short biographies of this genre during the past twelve months have succeeded despite these perils. Even more oddly, one was about Harold Macmillan and the other is about "Rob" Butler—two strangely antipathetic characters whose careers on the top level of high Conservative politics have been entwined for so many years. The late George Hutchinson wrote a brief, excellent and perceptive study of Macmillan last year. Patrick Cosgrave has produced an even better book on Rab. Clearly a biography of less than 150 pages can only be a prologue to the major work being written by Anthony Howard, who is Butler's "official" biographer. But this presumably will not appear during his subject's lifetime and since one wishes Lord Butler many more years of active retirement, one hopes that Mr Cosgrave's book will hold the field for a long while. There is not likely to be a better interim study, nor one more sympathetic and perceptive.

Cosgrave deserves all the more praise because he is not himself naturally inclined to approve of the strand in the Conservative tradition which Lord Butler has always represented—a cautious, middle-of-the-road, low-key pragmatism. To quote the last sentence of the book:

This biographer, who has less than full sympathy with the views and policies that Lord Butler has stood for, must, however, bend to admiration at his steadfastness, and even wish that the charge of the country, at a crucial point in its life, had been put into his less than flashy hands.

The key problem in Butler's career is why he failed to become Prime Minister. Of course there are many other aspects of his political life to consider: his major work on the 1944 Education Act; his contribution to the Conservative revival in 1950-51; his brilliantly tactful handling of the dissolution of the Central African Federation in 1963—so tactful that he did not even annoy Sir Roy Welensky, whose threshold of annoyance with British ministers was generally very low. But all these aspects are overshadowed by a major question mark. What was it that prevented a statesman of such proven ability in high office and with such a long record of loyal service to his party from reaching the top? There are other twentieth-century examples of men who were *paraboli* but did not become popes: Joseph Chamberlain, Curzon, Austen Chamberlain, Ernest Bevin. But the explanation in each instance is not difficult to discover. In the case of Butler it is, and there is still a constant flow of guesswork and speculation on the subject many years after the event.

It is, then, difficult to say one of the reasons. There has never been any dramatic opportunity. Butler, never a thinker of poetry in his careful, quiet, often deliberately opaque prose, it was not that he was incapable of hitting out at Labour. Cosgrave quotes an excellent example from his speech at the Conservative Conference in October 1963:

What nonsense it is to accept, as inevitable and right, the so-called swing of the pendulum. If we accept uncritically the theory of crick match, when each side must have its innings in turn—then we may be condemned for ever to an alternation between sensible and silly policies. After all, if the allies can always be sure of re-election if they wait long enough, then there is no compulsion on them to make themselves sensible.

These are impeccable Tory sentiments of which Margaret Thatcher would entirely approve, but she would not have used this sort of language on that of all occasions, if she had been, as Butler was, a candidate for the leadership stakes suddenly made wide open by the illness of the Prime Minister. The Conference wanted a clarion call, not a cool appeal to reason. Yet, although a certain element of showmanship is valuable in the television age to which Rab, unlike Eden and Macmillan, never quite adjusted himself, it is not indispensable. There is very little of the theatre in the composition of either Edward Heath or James Callaghan, but that deficiency did not stop them getting to the top. What else, then, stopped Rab?

Cosgrave rightly discounts the view that it was anything to do with his role as the Foreign Office spokesman for appeasement in 1938, although one of the best chapters of the book shows how skilfully Butler's own account of that episode in *The Art of the Possible* underplays his very strong support of the policy—symbolized by appointing, of all people, as his parliamentary private secretary, "Chips" Channon, one of the most rabid admirers of Neville Chamberlain. It is true that in 1957 Butler was passed over for a strong anti-appeaser, but six years later, when he was again passed over, the winner, Lord Home, far from being opposed to appeasement, had been Chamberlain's parliamentary secretary at the time of Munich. The truth is that the issue had become irrelevant long before 1957.

Another explanation beloved by trendy journalists of the time, was "class". In 1957 Winston Churchill advised the Queen to send for Macmillan. Eden who, contrary to the claims of some ignoramuses, was certainly consulted, also probably recommended Macmillan, though we cannot be sure of this. The Cabinet was polled through Lords Salisbury and Kilmuir and the Tory MPs and peers through the Whips, but it was Lord Salisbury, representative of one of the oldest and grandest Tory families in England, who conveyed the party's advice to the Queen. It was thus easy to manufacture the myth of a conspiracy by the establishment—an inner circle or, as it was termed after the war, looked like a repeat performance. In 1963, a "magic" circle—of old Etonians and Harrovian grandees to exclude a "middle-class" product of Marlborough. This was sorry stuff even at the time.

In fact there is no reason to doubt that in 1957 a party election would have produced the same result as the party's advice to the Queen. It was thus easy to manufacture the myth of a conspiracy by the establishment—an inner circle or, as it was termed after the war, looked like a repeat performance. In 1963, a "magic" circle—of old Etonians and Harrovian grandees to exclude a "middle-class" product of Marlborough. This was sorry stuff even at the time.

If he had refused to serve under Macmillan in 1957 Butler would have lost totally. In 1963 the situation was very different. His chances were much better and, if Macmillan had not prevented Butler's succession, he might well have won the day. The story of this episode, as time goes by, becomes more and more disturbing. One can only be glad that its revelations produced the major change in procedure initiated by Lord Home—an electoral system under which justice or injustice is not only done but is seen to have been done. In 1963, unlike 1957, a party vote might well have chosen Butler. Even under the existing conventions, his position was such that he could have prevented Home from becoming

Prime Minister by refusing to serve under him; and then the position would have been his, for, whatever the doubts of some MPs, they would surely have rallied to his support at that critical moment. Lord Home only barely lost the 1964 election, despite the "grouse moor image" and the "magic circle" and the refusal of Iain Macleod and Enoch Powell to serve under him. Rab would almost certainly have won it, and the political history of Britain might have been very different if he had.

History is full of "ifs" and there is no point in speculating too much about them. Butler was a non-resigner, and party politics would be impossible if the great majority of politicians did not not take the same view as he did. Nevertheless there are moments when people should refuse to serve, despite the perils and the obloquy.

His idea—his ideal—of service, though it encompassed putting plans and policies in a reasonably popular form, did not include going all out for R. A. Butler. He had (and, I think, has) no conception of how much his decision not to fight meant to people like Macleod, Powell and Aldington, not to mention many much humbler party servants.

This is a perceptive comment. One can let people down in certain circumstances much by not resigning or by resigning. Butler's failure to appreciate the loyalty of his supporters—a by-product of his curious remoteness and his inglorious distaste for the smoking-room of the House of Commons—was one of his political defects. It fits with that ambiguity, oracular wit and obscurity of utterance which have so often puzzled his friends as much as his enemies. However, politicians, like all of us, have only one life to live, and a person who prefers domesticity, reading and painting to drinks, cigars and gossip cannot be morally censured.

There was another difficulty and Cosgrave sums it up in this passage:

Butler has always managed to raise doubt, suspicion and dislike wherever he has gone. This is not merely a matter of criticism of him for, say, his stand on appeasement, or for his apparent disloyalty during the Suez operation. . . . It is, rather, a profound suspicion of something in the man that his enemies seem not altogether to be able to define. Of course many have resented (and have had cause to resent) the sharpness of his tongue, or his undoubted intellectual arrogance, his apparent detachment from ordinary concerns, his lofty air, his occasional verbal cruelty, his many indiscretions, smoothed over and blotted out in his book. But even the sum of all these things does not convey the total effect which, again and again, has ensured a solid body of backbench Conservative opinion opposed to Butler, and not all of them by any means on the right of the party.

Perhaps one need go no further in order to explain his failure to become Prime Minister. People did not know quite why they disliked the late Dr. Fell, but they knew that they disliked him—and that was enough.

Mr Cosgrave's book is not without defects. There are factual errors and sentences which suggest over-hasty writing or, inadequately proof corrected. Macmillan's "night of the long knives" in July 1962 preceded, not succeeded the Vassall and Profumo affairs and de Gaulle's veto. And what on earth is meant by saying that Butler "would have won the 1964 election" shortly after the Conservative defeat which he retired to Trinity? This is a forgotten no index—a deficiency which even in a short book should not be tolerated by any publisher—and there are no references. Nevertheless, this is an acute and sensitive study of one of the most intriguing political figures of our day. It is not the last word there may never be one—but it is a very illuminating first word.

Il Palazzo di Paranoia

After thirty years in have no real home. No deeds, mortgage, front gate, not to be recognized by my territorial clone. Set up by purple in the air frequency. Of looking, devoid of that weight of stone. True possessors draw with them when they step. I stroke hooks and records for my ownership.

My movements now the code of a con. My company is those who've gone away. The ageing self's a bitter-sweet tempo. Comfortable, potent, fond of delay. And then the devil round recurring corners. How they swarm at parties, with their luzz. Of beds and love, who doesn't and who does.

Once I had two ends to harmonise. The wearing carpets and the darkening walls. Two children and one cat perhaps a flea. Enough when my morning light recalls. Regular austerities behind the eyes. Of golden avarice and mimic histories. I seem to rise from sleep on hunched knees.

Home again to three more trappings. News from the normal waiting with stocked plates. To raise a regiment. But you can refuse. If you have seen the Sekou and the Fata. Trussed on walls, whose clutch of claws. Is scattered idly in that great air of clouds. Of dreams; you can be hewn out of town.

Miles out of that Palace where freedom dance. And the Chhulho, the Musea and the Month. Offer each glittering significance. To things unthought and things that happened once. There on with the profile of an Estense Prince. Shows you the estate and takes you to. The room where death is waiting for you.

Peter Porter

Grandmother

Rises before the first bird. Slugs about in egg-sized allipers. Bothers the anxious whores. Of the washing-machine with small bequests. Collected from our rooms. Whoops up the bill. Resolves a lost blanket. Firmly ignores. With total grace, you nakadians. And mine.

At seven the kitchen's a ill quoriar-deok. She gulliontines out with a hand. Veined like Silene. Doves black, damp bread. Ingole of butter; cheese, green gods-along. Thinks, loudly, in ground German. Soudan long. And morning glories across anonymous crops. To wharve the outbath, fuoni with eers. Spoole north to Frankfurt, and unpromised land.

The clock, carted from Prague, hazards an hour. A neighbour's child appears, failed priest of light. In shirt and table-runner; ruptures mass. From *Hänsel and Gretel*. Does his holy best. To trip her. Fleches augur, sausage. Spoils her apron-strings. She lets it all go by. With the same shrug she gave when the burlesque. Refused to let a vamp it into life. And her to church. Perhaps it was the same. In Hitler's children: the Budeien farm. Left in a moment, and her history. Carried in paper bags beneath each arm.

Her face is like a man's. A Roman break. Cereus might quail and the equal, square frame. An lion of compassion. As she turns. Towards the lightning light, behind her eye. Burn embers of Europa's foul allegory. Her body bears its harsh original, dug. With weary instruments of blood and bone. And still, I'm certain, she could up and stick. A yelling pig, a pris, a parisian. With equal mercy. Or a lock of life. She's wise as standing stones. Her gift of years. Almost parades belief in God, the Devil. Their parallel uncles. Both heaven and hell. Entirely unprepared for her arrival.

Charles Casley

The longing for belonging

By Patrick McCarthy

ANNIE COHEN-SOLAL
Paul Nizan
Communist Impossible
Avec la collaboration de Henriette Nizan
286pp. Paris: Grasset.
2 262 5341 1
PASCAL ORY
Nizan
Dessin d'un révolté, 1905-1940
331pp. Paris: Ramsay.
2 83956 188 9

When Paul Nizan broke with the French Communist Party after the Nazi-Soviet pact he became a man-person. Even while it vilified the pact the party also denied that he had ever existed. Nizan remained a non-person until 1960 when Jean-Paul Sartre, who had supported the Communists during the Cold War but had broken with them after the Russian invasion of Hungary, resurrected his old friend by writing an enthusiastic introduction to a new edition of Nizan's pamphlet *Aden Arabie*. The book, sold well, Nizan's other books were re-issued and he was much admired by the young militants of May '68.

In the 1970s his novels were turned into television films and now he is the subject of these two long books.

Annie Cohen-Solal and Pascal Ory both analyse Nizan's life, his writing and his political evolution. Cohen-Solal's book is fuller, because she was helped in its preparation by Nizan's wife, Rictte Alpha. But both critics are thoroughly competent and there is only one important difference of interpretation between them.

Weber is able to explain the main thrust of Nizan's early life, his relationship with his father, Nizan's grandfather was Breton farmer who went to work on the railway and his father became a railway engineer. The family moved into the middle classes but during the First World War the engineer made a mistake in the fabrication of shells and was brutally deported. Betrayed by the class he so admired, he grew moody, washed for nights on end and talked about suicide. It remains unclear how this "influenced" his writing towards his son but certainly the young Nizan was filled with rage against the middle classes and famished by death.

Sartre, who met Nizan at the Lycée Henri IV and moved on with him to the Ecole Normale, describes this obsession: "Nizan used to see himself as a corpse . . . he would jump up with his eyes full of worms and vomit. The next day we would find him dead in a sink." In a crowd of strangers, Sartre and Nizan were united by their determination never to be loved. Their "cynicism" shocked Simone de Beauvoir, for they mocked not merely families and the big bourgeoisie but idealism, sincerity and morality. To them men were "minds" but bodies wrecked by sex and lust, and adrift in a brutal struggle.

In 1926 Nizan went off to Aden, where he worked for an English trader and thought seriously about becoming a businessman. When he returned he made two decisions: that he would not marry and that he would not join the Communist Party. Nizan was driven by his need to belong. The excitement of Aden re-awakened in him the Breton peasant he wanted to be, and he bought a piece of land, nearest the party cell. Sartre, who despised both politics and money, could not understand why Nizan would give up the freedom of his vision of a free world for the security of a party. Nizan allowed them. The party was the way of the friend, and he was not alone.

My enthusiasm for this book is not shared by Todd's erstwhile journalist colleagues on *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Under the rather neat title "Un fils Révolté" (Todd makes it clear that he

took his share of the vote dropped to 9 per cent, while Stalin urged his French comrades to be aggressively working-class, anti-intellectual and sectarian. Yet this herd like Nizan because it offered him a vehicle for his hatred of the middle classes. He published his vitriolic pamphlets—*Aden Arabie* (1931) and *Les Chiens de garde* (1932)—became a full-time party worker and in 1934 he went off to Moscow.

The Soviet Union disappointed him in only one respect: he discovered that in the Marxist utopia people were still afraid of death. While he was there the Communist line changed. Shocked by Hitler's rise to power and by the riots of February 1934, Stalin began to look for allies. In France the Communists and the Socialists started the discussions which led to the Popular Front.

This new period suited Nizan just as well as the old. The party's cultural policy was to welcome fellow-travellers and all anti-Fascists. Nizan heaped praise on Cide, at least until Cide dared to criticize the Soviet Union in his *Retour de PIRISS*. When the party discovered that Marxism and religion were no longer incompatible Nizan was sent to talk to Dominicans.

Cohen-Solal argues that he was already unhappy with the party but she is not convincing, and one tends to agree with Ory, who thinks that he was good years for Nizan. He was ambitious and he sometimes felt that the party did not recognize his merits. He fell foul of Aragon, who had become the great Communist writer and wanted no rivals. But Nizan's

books were praised by Communist reviewers and translated into Russian, and he wrote regularly in the party papers *L'Humanité* and *Ce Soir*.

In the summer of 1939 Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir met Nizan in Marseille. It was in an exuberant mood and he told them there was no risk of war; the British-French-Russian alliance was too strong for Hitler. Nizan went off on holiday to Corsica, where he read in the newspapers about the Nazi-Soviet pact. On September 25, after the invasion of Poland, he published a letter announcing his resignation from the party.

His reasons were complex. He declared to his wife that he understood why Stalin had signed the pact but that the French Communists should not have approved it. Communism could not flourish in France, Nizan declared correctly, unless it was nationalistic. Moreover the need to defend Russia did not justify Stalin's invasion of eastern Poland. These were logical reasons but Nizan was also guided by his tempestuous nature. The party to which he had given so much had betrayed him.

He put the full force of his rage into defiance. When his old comrades denounced him and tried to persuade his wife to leave him, Nizan, who was now in the army, remained loyal. He was a Communist, he declared, but not a party member. One can only guess what his subsequent political course would have been because he was killed in May 1940. He was acting as interpreter for a British regiment which was retreating towards

Dunkirk when a stray bullet struck him in the head.

Sartre did not forget Nizan and indeed the second half of his own life may be viewed as a replay of Nizan's. The need to find something solid and real in an empty universe drove Sartre to develop the concept of "situation" and then to take up politics. The PCF offered a concrete framework in which to act and a contact with the working class. Then, after years of uneasy collaboration with the French Communists, Sartre decided, like Nizan, that they were hopeless.

In his preface to *Aden Arabie*, Sartre describes Nizan's writings as a call to arms and certainly it is his violence that makes them live today. *Aden Arabie* and *Les Chiens de garde* are pamphlets in a long French tradition that can be right as well as left-wing. The first offers no serious analysis of colonialism. It is a diatribe against the city of London, merchants who swell up at sundown and colonial ladies whose drawing-rooms are decorated with portraits of Queen Victoria who had, according to Nizan, "the small, pinched eyes of a drunkard". Similarly, *Les Chiens de garde* is not a sophisticated refutation of 1930s French philosophy. Nizan denounces the pretensions of philosophers: they are not objective, they have fat, expensively-dressed bodies as well as minds and their quest for the universal and the metaphysical is a way to disguise the class struggle. The French education system is a decaying corpse and the only hope lies in "the machine-guns of civil war". Out of the battle will come a new philosophy and a new man—Bolshevik man.

Nizan presents Rosenthal and the others with cold irony. They flirt with revolution and publish a magazine that has a machine-gun on the cover but offers "no real threat to capitalism". The genuine threat comes from the PC, and *La Conspiration* contains the obligatory portrait of a good communist. Meticulously it is brief on Nizan, who is looking back on his Ecole Normale days from the same viewpoint as Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir would adopt in *Les Mots* and *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée*, concentrates on mocking his fledgling revolutionaries. This sarcasm, with the vitriol of *Aden Arabie*, are the most original traits of Nizan's writing.

Fifty years after Nizan wrote this the French education system is still thriving and Bolshevik men are still unborn, but communism had served the writer Nizan well. It gives a special edge of accuracy to his novels—*Aden Arabie* (1933), *Les Chiens de garde* (1935) and *La Conspiration* (1938) which is the best of them. The revolutionary Nizan was a conservative novelist and *La Conspiration* offers no innovations of language or narrative technique. It is a long novel about a group of Ecole Normale revolutionaries and their families. Nizan was haunted by the bourgeois family, with its rituals of country weekends, its respect for emulsion and power, and its sexual taboos. He half-fears that it would prove too strong for the party. One young revolutionary, Rosenthal, flaunts his defiance of his family by seducing his brother's wife only to find that she goes meekly back to her husband and that the family is willing to forgive him.

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Disengaging from Sartre

By Philip Thody

OLIVIER TODD
Un fils rebelle
293pp. Paris: Grasset.

In 1948, when still in his teens, Olivier Todd married Paul Nizan's daughter Anne-Marie. After leaving the Communist party in protest against the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939, Nizan had, as *Le Figaro Magazine* put it, "got himself killed" at Dunkirk, so that his erstwhile friend from Ecole Normale days, Jean-Paul Sartre, was acting as guardian to his two children. This led to Sartre being Anne-Marie's stepfather, as well as being the father figure for whom Olivier Todd was then so urgently seeking. It was this father-son relationship which led to the dedication of this book, a quotation from the dedication which Sartre once wrote in a copy of one of his works: "A Olivier Todd, mon fils rebelle, un père dix fois massacré et qui ne s'en porte pas plus mal et qui s'en porte mieux."

The massacre referred to is both a philosophical and political one. As a bilingual Anglophile who read philosophy at Cambridge in the 1940s, Todd has understandably little time for *L'Être et le Néant*. It is, he maintains, best read as a novel, "a fantastic verbal metastasis: a mass of nouns and verbs falling over one another . . . a strange feast, a pure and impure product of an architect's genius for the twentieth century." It is not for me to disagree, being perhaps even more important to Olivier Todd than Olivier Todd, but one can express surprise (not anyone could ever have thought otherwise, I am even fuller in my applause for Todd's suggestion that the defenders of pure French were making a mistake in fighting against the *frangants* of vocabulary rather than against the *frangants* of philosophical thought).

My enthusiasm for this book is not shared by Todd's erstwhile journalist colleagues on *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Under the rather neat title "Un fils Révolté" (Todd makes it clear that he

owns almost as much to J. P. Revel's celebrated pamphlet *Pourquoi des philosophes?* as to *Langue, Truth and Logic*). Walter Lewin once said him in the paper of being "more excited to give lessons than to act as a balanced and objective witness." This is especially true, argues Lewin, when Todd contrasts his anti-American excesses of 1967 with his agonizing reappraisal of 1973. Lewin thinks he should have persisted "contre vent et marée" in remaining loyal, instead of going off to write for Sir James Goldsmith's *L'Express*. One can indeed see how *Un fils rebelle* must be to anyone who wants to maintain that Sartre's fundamental anarchism in political matters, and especially his support for the Communists in Vietnam and elsewhere, ever did anyone any good. "Whom would you choose for the happiness of a people," asks Todd to a question which contains its own unanswerable reply. "Sartre's two former 'friends', Mao and Castro, or some unknown and middle-of-the-road Prime Minister from Denmark or Venezuela?"

For as Todd rightly observes, both Sartre and his *Nouvel Observateur* were wrong in the two basic assumptions which governed their political thinking from 1964 onwards: that Communism would become progressively more liberal; throughout the world, and that French Communism would not lag behind. It was this conviction which enabled the French left to pedal for half a century in the view that only American imperialism existed, and in his account of the steps which led him to abandon this central article in his spiritual father's faith, Todd is surely writing for a while generation of French left-wing intellectuals.

He sees the root cause of Sartre's political aberrations in the hatred which he felt for the French middle class and which, with the help of Marxism, he raised to the level of a world-wide metaphysical force and revolutionary force. I should have liked a more specific analysis, especially from one who knew well, as to why Sartre disliked the middle class so much, though *Un fils rebelle* does provide the elements

of a reply. Todd points a delightful picture of Sartre reacting against childhood enthusiasm that *Saint Gégé, comédien d'envie* should have turned out to be so long, but he also reveals a less attractive aspect of the Master's intellectual behaviour when he notes that Sartre rarely read the works of those with whom he disagreed. He tended, even before his loss of sight made it unfortunately inevitable, to rely on what he was told. By Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques-Laurent Bost or another member of what Todd refers to as "la famille".

Un fils rebelle presents a fascinating account of this adoptive family; and of the way it worked together to produce *Les Temps Modernes*. We also catch a convincing glimpse of Simone de Beauvoir, keeping an eye on Sartre's drinking, pursuing her lips at his obvious delight in discussing "les histoires de cul et de bordel", fulfilling in Todd's eyes the role of "the perfect nineteenth-century middle class wife, accepting all these female comets rotating round her husband because she knows she will survive them all". Walter Lewin suggests that the account of the men in the family—and especially of Bost, Horkheimer and Francis Jeanson—is not exempt from the rancour de petit frère mal aimé, but we shall have to wait until the publication of their various *intimités* to find out more about this, and to see whether Sartre

did indeed play for others, apart from Olivier Todd, the role of father-figure so well presented in this book.

There is certainly plenty of evidence in his published work to suggest that Sartre was obsessed by the concept of fatherhood: the relationship between Horkheimer and Hugo in *Les Mots* and between old von Gerlach and Frantz in *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, the opening pages of *Les Mots* and of *L'Idiot de la Famille*, the essay on Paul Nizan. Olivier Todd's own quest for a father, clearly struck an answering chord, though the story of his successful emancipation, casts some doubts upon Sartre's insistence, in *Les Mots*, on presenting all sons as so many Aeneases carrying their Anchises permanently on their backs.

In February 1980, Raymond, Guy-Crozier, chaired a conference on Camus at Gênesville. The purpose of the second gathering was to measure the changes, for better or worse, that can be perceived in the almost unrecognizable body of Camus' *philosophy*. Guy-Crozier has edited a volume of the proceedings of the second conference, *Albert Camus 1980* (330pp). University Presses of Florida \$16. 08130 0691 01, which includes contributions on "Problèmes de méthodologie", "Narration et fiction", "Théâtre", "Philosophie", and "Réception et biographie".

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commentary

Shakespeare: in miniature . . .

By Nicholas Shrimpton

Anthony and Cleopatra
BBC TV

Jonathan Miller's production of *Anthony and Cleopatra* proves to be an extended pun on the word "composed". His Egypt is the Orient of Veronese's "The Family of Darius before Alexander", where Renaissance ladies in satin and ringlets meet Roman heroes in shapely cuirasses and greaves. And, like Veronese, Miller chooses to arrange these characters into expressive tableaux before unashamedly one-dimensional settings. On occasion such painterly conceptions produce a ravishing interplay of foreground and background. A wordlessly fretful Cleopatra, for example, is glimpsed between Charmian and the Soothsayer. The mourning Caesar is framed by his officers as he weeps in the depths of his tent. But on the whole it is the surface plane with which we are concerned. Actors play, seemingly, inches from the lens. The predominant effect is of complicated events in a crowded corridor.

The reason why this elegant construction does not produce more fuss and bother is the other point of the pun. Miller's *Anthony and Cleopatra* is composed in the emotional as well as in the artistic sense. Colin Blakely's jaunty gamecock of an Anthony is an anomalously noisy man in a quiet world. Cresser speaks in a dour Scots whisper. Pompey with the calculating murmur of a thug on the make. Even Cleopatra, though she allows herself moments of aristocratic sprightliness, is a model of elegant manners and fills the play with incantatory calm.

This joint effect of visual and verbal serenity is, of course, evidence of how deeply Jonathan Miller has pondered his medium. Television is both flat and intimate. Shakespeare's theatre was neither, and the director who seeks to transfer its texts to the screen must come to terms with the disparity. After the echoing halls and lengthy vistas of *Titus of Athens*, the BBC Shakespeare has now turned to a kind of theatrical "ballet", designing static and shallow pictures which are studied with unblinking care. Pompey, Meas and Menecrates discuss tactics in a rigid, full-frontal line. Enobarbus outstares the viewer as he button-holes us with his shame. And when this insistent camera is not putting us into bed with Cleopatra it is giving us a beautician's view of her's pimple.

Hand in hand with this steady intimacy goes a necessary diminution of the heroic gesture. The utterance of entrance and exit lines ("From Sicily, ho, the news! Speak there!") is an obvious choice when a director is obliged to cut in theory such material is redundant as soon as an actor can slide into shot rather than stride on from a living house. And its absence undoubtedly helps to reduce the clangour and remoteness of the play.

Shakespeare's dramatic material, at which first impressions double about the possibility of *Anthony and Cleopatra* is intelligent and sophisticated. It is arguable that Shakespeare gave his Anthony too few heroic lines in the first place. "Take away the opportunity to be imperious even to his mistress" and his statue as a triple-miller of the world become credible. Denied his lack of inches, Blakely resists the idea that Anthony is taller than the first, and does his best to protect a commanding manner. But the production's stillness restricts his finest effects to private life and turns his martial mode to bluster.

All about him people behave as if they already knew that there was to be a death in the house. At one point I even began to wonder whether Dolabella might not appro-

riately be replaced by a new character called Decibella, round from the Tribunal of the Environment to monitor a noise abatement order. In such circumstances he prospers best who whispers best, and the triumphs of the production are Emrys James's Enobarbus and Ian Charleson's Caesar. The latter somehow combines a stony inhibition with a naked itch for power, and caps them with a splendid account of the repressed man breaking down once his ends are finally achieved. James senses the opportunities which an intimate stage style gives in the playing of Enobarbus and exploits them greedily. His back-stairs manner and his secret crisis of conscience are both delightful: his delivery of "The barge shaft in" as lascivious male gossip over the after-dinner port casts real new light into the play. Both men benefit mightily from Miller's distinctive

combination of visual invention and psychological aptness.

In their best moments Colin Blakely and his Cleopatra, Jane Lapotaire, benefit from these things too. Breaking the news of Fulvia's death, or achieving the difficult reconciliation after the sen-battle, they generate an authentic emotion. But their inhibiting context works constantly against them. Jane Lapotaire's early endowments to suggest the wanton are stifled by the chilly elegance of her dress. By the final act, when the same costume might help the regal dignity of her dying, the visual style has shifted and she chokes out her final speeches, very much an ordinary woman, in a voluminous nightie. Within its careful limits this *Anthony and Cleopatra* moves very surely. But it is a smaller thing than Shakespeare.



Costume design by Georges Braque for a courtier in *Les Facheux* (1924). — one of the lots in Sotheby's sale of Ballet Designs on June 4. The sale includes the contents of one of the world's most important collections in this field, the John Carr Doughty Collection, among whose treasures are the private scrapbooks of Anna Pavlova.

... coming to grief ...

By Jacqueline Pearson

Will
Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester

Will, the programme tells us, is Gregory Hefson's "exploration of Shakespeare's preoccupations and passions". Alan Parlington plays Shakespeare and with four actors presents a patchwork of quotations, mostly Shakespeare's, from his plays and poems. (Sadly, he explores only a tiny corner of Shakespeare's preoccupations and passions, since what it suggests is that he was a miserable pessimist. "All the fools are about: Leanne and Crab) physical violence (the Dro-mios) damnation (Macbeth's porter) and the corruption of words (Peste) the comic writer's job: in a quotation from *Love's Labour's Lost* "to move wild laughter in the throat of death" and all such is "impossible".

The longest, and perhaps least satisfying, section is that on Anthony. Shakespeare here appears as a milk-and-water liberal, recognized by the inequalities of the capitalist system, but not able to stop trucking to the system he despises to make a living. Shakespeare's "in other words," says Gregory Hefson, "is the smallest proportion of Shakespeare's own

words. It seems a disturbing evasion that the crucial proof of Shakespeare's political alienation should come not from his own writing but from Bond's *Brigo*. (Curiously enough this is not acknowledged anywhere in the programme, so hosts of Manchester school-boys will go through life with some strange ideas on Shakespeare's style.)

Will is a kind of Marlowite-style review, with nods, or more, to Beckett as well as Boed. Some of the quotations it selects are obvious: it ends with the inevitable chunk of Prospero. At the same time there are also some daft "My lady is virtuous" leads and Parlington's attack on virtue in *Henry IV* is well handled. Richard II's wooing of Lady Anne is confronted by a parallel pair of lovers, Petruchio and Katherine, and Petruchio actually asserts his male authority by keeping on Kate's offered hand. Men in love, according to Will, Shakespeare is a domestic tyrant woman a victim, a whore, or a harlot. The contrasting description of Cleopatra's infinite variety is made to seem only wishful thinking.

In *Love's Labour's Lost* Much often to path Arragon to complete, three years' study in an hour. Gregory Hefson tries to bring the complete plays of Shakespeare and a sizeable piece of Edward Bond into a similar period. Neither exercise seems a good idea.

... in earnest ...

By Julie Hankey

The Merchant of Venice
Royal Shakespeare Theatre,
Stratford-upon-Avon

If, as the crier park attendant thought when I told him what the play was, *The Merchant of Venice* means "Ah, Shylock", John Barton has gone far in making it "Ah, Portia" as well. Across the divide separating the mercantile dealings of Venice from the romance of Belmont this production brings out a continuity of feeling which makes it impossible for Shylock — even David Suchet's — to run away with the evening.

"Imagine a Portia seriously alarmed by the prospect of an Arragon or Morocco for a husband," wrote Granville-Barker, meaning that the idea was absurd. But Sinead Cusack's sudden burst of tears over her hard promise, and her barely controlled agony in the casket scenes, make perfect sense of it. The moment Arragon falls with the cold casket and exits, she kneels, rapt, before the only possible one, the leaden box. Flesh and blood, we are made to feel, is as much at stake as the flesh in Shylock's bond. The sight of her enduring the caresses of Terry Wood's mountainously voluptuous Morocco is as shocking as the prospect of Antonio under the knife. And when at last, sure of Bassanio, she flings aside the little table with its gold and silver caskets, there plainly is the reverse side of Shylock's scorn for the offered ducats.

The love on her side and the hate on his make no nonsense of the etiquette, legal or romantic, of money. The acting is in earnest on both sides of the story, and makes a connection which takes colour from John Barton's late nineteenth-century setting (as it did from Jonathan Miller's). There, as in a Dickens novel, Portia's isolated virginity finds a natural place alongside the world of merchants and usurers.

As a link between the two worlds Jonathan Hyde's Bassanio looks as much towards Antonio, as towards Portia. For this, Barton turns Shakespeare's reluctance over the two men to account. In a long pause during their first scene, when their friends have gone, they positively relax in each other's company. Their understanding, so full of impossibility, can only be tacit. Bassanio turns to quiet laughter by giving his friend a little musical box, and a similar lightness of touch characterizes most of their encounters. But enough is achieved in those unspoken moments for one to believe Bassanio, for the moment at least, when he says in the bond scene that he would sacrifice his wife and all the world to deliver Antonio. Tom Wilkinson's merchant bears his lot with a glum doggedness which, persists even into the happy ending. He looks between the lovers helplessly, and when at last, putting off his grandeur of wedding flowers, he sadly leaves the stage to them, one feels that the centre of the play lies somewhere between these three.

Having said that, it is impossible not to dwell on David Suchet. His Jew is no "chapter of Coheer", but a grotesquerie, bustling Cohen out of *Daniel Deronda*. His whole body speaks. His hands swoop and stab, his shoulders curve and lift in protest of astonishment. Being a short man, he slides in under the noses of his oppressors, jangling his hand here and there (Antonio shrinks at the touch), and spitting out in their faces his lines about their own "spits and spurs". He swears the comic Shylock by force of authority and control, not by seeking sympathy. In the performance I was all when he came to Leanna's triumph, which he would not have given for a wilder, more of monkey. He subdued the

titters in the audience with a long calculating pause, and his closing vow to have Antonio's heart was dropped into a perfect hush.

On the whole, passionate logic rather than pathos is his strength against Christian hypocrisy, but at the end he manages pathos as well. He kneels for mercy with a wryly smiling sense of habit, as though it were an old game, this, of bearing the ancient curse. He stumbles a little getting up, but with a quick self-deprecating laugh refuses Portia's hand, and simply takes himself off. Barton makes no claims for himself, Bassanio's and Antonio's relief comes across no less strongly for Shylock's humiliation, nor is Shylock less tragic for Antonio's joy. Each is taken as it comes. What is left is a fierce, double feeling which the last scenes, by avoiding any kind of wedding rumpus, wistfully sustain.

... and all that

By David Nokes

Shakespeare's Love Royal and the Loves of Henry VIII
St George's Theatre

"Love's not Time's fool" is the motto for this evening of electronic pageantry in which bluff King Hal (VIII) quotes Shakespeare, and the Seven Ages of Man are reduced to just three, culminating with the last, "sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad". Yet, despite the many nuances that sigh all round the stage, the production remains chilly, formal and reverential. The only date that matters in this up-market version of *The Good Old Days* is the coincidence that Shakespeare's birthday probably fell on St George's day. The St George's Theatre, with its avowed aim of working firmly within the "English tradition", has seized on the conjunction as the excuse for this pathetic confection in celebration of the royal nuptials.

The Shakespearean scenes in the first half of the programme are chauvinistic in all senses. They include bluff King Hal (V)'s wooing of Katherine, and the tamed Shrew's address to all wives, "thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper... Both are delivered with an unbroken gusto that sets itself resolutely against discovering any of the darker subtleties contained within these formal poems to patriotism and patriarchy. All the Shakespearean episodes have the safe appeal of well-rendered anthology pieces, presented with an uncomplicated, though not always as unconfused, energy. A cross-gendered Orsino bids Snek's Noise play out, Orsino's unreluctant Jacques (David Sumner) seems half disposed to join the dancing measures of the company in Arden; the piping songs of the bereached Viola (Eunice Roberts) lose themselves in the cavernous arches of this converted church.

Part Two, *The Loves of Henry VIII*, is a hurried medley of the last half of the programme, with a bluff King Hal (I) interlarded with snippets of history, warranted memorable by *1566* and *all that*. The main sedentary monarch (David Wilton) who makes love by winks and letters, given Shakespeare's consent to dignity his jousts. He also recites "Woe is a beautiful thing" and "They are the lines about their own 'spits and spurs'". He swears the comic Shylock by force of authority and control, not by seeking sympathy. In the performance I was all when he came to Leanna's triumph, which he would not have given for a wilder, more of monkey. He subdued the

to the editor

Marxism and the Law

Sir, — Eugene Kamenka's review-article on Marxism and the law (May 1) contains a number of inaccuracies. First, his judgment that Bernard Edelman's *Ownership of the Image* "rides on the back" of E. B. Pashukanis's theory and "turns [it]... into jargon" is neither accurate nor fair. In the introduction to the English translation of the book, which Kamenka reviewed, I make clear that Edelman's and Pashukanis's views of law differ fundamentally. Edelman's theory is not borrowed from Pashukanis. Moreover, the greater part of Edelman's book is a study of how the theories that define and underpin the category of "intellectual property" in French law are forced to accommodate photography and the cinema. Pashukanis has nothing to say about the question, so it would be difficult in the extreme for Edelman to ride on his back. "Jargon" is in the eye of the beholder, but Edelman's theoretical language, although often difficult, elliptical and mannered, is not empty, redundant or derivative.

Second, it is not true of Karl Renner's *The Institutions of Private Law and their Social Functions* that the "English translation has not been reprinted since" it first appeared in 1949. It was reprinted by Routledge and Kegan Paul in 1976 and is, I believe, still available.

Third, it is inaccurate and grossly unfair to say that "Pashukanis's vision of a socialist society in which Law is replaced by Plan can and did lead to the horrors of Stalinism". I do not dispute those horrors, and it is only fair that Kamenka notes that Pashukanis was a victim of Stalin's purges. But his views, whether led to or not, had nothing to do with the horrors of Stalinism. It is so intense that he criticised the taking notes after every conversation; for "from the first" — apparently intending to make a book of it; and for "planting" a reporter "to take down every word, while a photographer surreptitiously snapped pictures".

Three half-truths and a gaffe. All the time I made them, the notes were for inclusion with letters to a novelist friend with whom I have maintained day-to-day correspondence for thirty-five years. Professor Martin is either more naïve than a writer of his stature could possibly be or his resentment obscures actuality. Of course, since I was observing an Edmund Wilson that no one else was describing for publication, I hoped my material might eventually see print. As for taping his remarks — in that class of mine he attended or elsewhere — it never occurred to me. Professor Martin seriously misread the chapter. Edmund Wilson never objected to pictures. What Professor Martin calls "surveillance" resulted from my desire not to distract the attention of a seventy-year-old man who disliked speaking in public.

I was surprised to learn from the review that "genealogy" and "architecture" were fields in which I have no interest: were "the two chief concerns that had brought Wilson to Talcottville". His feeling for family and place are hardly equivalent to genealogy and architecture. And, as I note in my preface, he came upstairs every May through October "to get away from everything else". I was also surprised to learn from Professor Martin that our "most intimate relationship" — Edmund Wilson was the best judge of that. He would have known if there was frustration and dissolved the relationship. The relationship I describe in the memoir was, as I acknowledge, not intimate but it was warm and warm in friendship, after a time, has little to do with specific topics.

I plead guilty to including remarks on one writer in the face of Wilson's remarks, which are not unfavourable to the writer, come to light sixteen years after he made them and eight years after his death. Professor Martin speaks of the limitations of my literary interests as if I was under some obligation to trot out the name of every writer who ever interested me — or that Wilson was. Such recitals make dull reading. Our relationship, on the contrary, had variety and balance — literary and domestic — and if this reviewer can find, as he apparently did, that gossip dominated, it may be because he mistakes what goes on in graduate seminars for what goes on in life.

Crowe's minute of July 25, 1914, asking the Foreign Secretary to consider what the attitude of Russia and France might be to India and the Mediterranean if they won a war from the British would "both endanger our friendship with Russia and find in a comparatively near future that we have sacrificed our whole position in the Persian Gulf, and are faced in consequence with a situation where our very existence as an Empire will be at stake"; and above all on the "unlikelihood of Russia *l'heure* being amenable to any arrangement concerning an area which Crowe admitted on July 23, 1914, that HMG was "impotent to absorb or to assume any responsibility for its good government".

KEITH WILSON.
School of History, The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT.

'Edmund Wilson: Our Neighbor'

Sir, — Robert Bernard Martin's slyly disparaging review of my memoir, *Edmund Wilson: Our Neighbor from Talcottville* (March 20), is preoccupied by the presumptive loss to scholarship of the fact that I, "a middle-aged journalist recently turned to teaching", should have had the gall of a decade's friendship with the book's subject rather than he, an academic from Princeton University, E. W.'s alma mater.

Professor Martin's overriding objection is to the fact that I wrote the book at all. His dismay over the book *long ago* is so intense that he criticises me for taking notes after every conversation; for "from the first" — apparently intending to make a book of it; and for "planting" a reporter "to take down every word, while a photographer surreptitiously snapped pictures". Three half-truths and a gaffe. All the time I made them, the notes were for inclusion with letters to a novelist friend with whom I have maintained day-to-day correspondence for thirty-five years. Professor Martin is either more naïve than a writer of his stature could possibly be or his resentment obscures actuality. Of course, since I was observing an Edmund Wilson that no one else was describing for publication, I hoped my material might eventually see print. As for taping his remarks — in that class of mine he attended or elsewhere — it never occurred to me. Professor Martin seriously misread the chapter. Edmund Wilson never objected to pictures. What Professor Martin calls "surveillance" resulted from my desire not to distract the attention of a seventy-year-old man who disliked speaking in public.

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writer who ever interested me — or that Wilson was. Such recitals make dull reading. Our relationship, on the contrary, had variety and balance — literary and domestic — and if this reviewer can find, as he apparently did, that gossip dominated, it may be because he mistakes what goes on in graduate seminars for what goes on in life.

RICHARD HAUSER COSTA.
College Station, Texas 77840.

'The Crucible'

Sir, — Stephen Fender's review of *The Crucible* (Commentary, April 24) states that the BBC production is the "first ever television production". The BBC did issue this story via the *Radio Times*, but it is not true.

The first performance on television in this country was done by Granada Television on November 3, with Sean Connery and Susannah York. It is surprising that the BBC did not check this before they decided to produce the play, there is of course no reason why they should not have televised the play after Granada. We expect them to follow Granada in most things.

SIDNEY BERNSTEIN.
36 Golden Square, London W1R 4AH.

Herbert Howells

Sir, — My attention has been drawn to a review by Anthony Burgess of the book by Antony Hopkins entitled *The Nine Symphonies of Beethoven* (May 1).

In the course of his review, Mr Burgess refers to the "late Dr Herbert Howells".

Dr Howells is still very much alive, though as he is in his eighty-ninth year he is very much less in the public eye than he was.

DAVID WILLCOCKS.
Royal College of Music, Prince Consort Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2BS.

H. L. Mencken

Sir, — D. J. Enright's observation (April 10) that "H. L. Mencken's theory that British and American would diverge increasingly has hardly been borne out" was made by Mencken himself forty-five years ago. In his preface to the fourth edition of *The American Language* Mencken wrote: "The reader familiar with my earlier editions will find this [the fourth edition] not only presents a large amount of matter that was not available when they were written, but also modifies the thesis which they set forth. When I became interested in the subject and began writing about it (in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* in 1910), the American form of the English language was plainly departing from the parent stem, and it seemed at least likely that the differences would go on increasing... But since 1923 the pull of 'American' has become so powerful that it has begun to drag English with it, and in consequence some of the differences once visible have tended to disappear... The English writers who note this change lay it to the influence of the American movies and talkies, but it seems to me that there is also something more, and something deeper. The American people now constitute by far the largest fraction of the English-speaking race, and since the World War [One] they have shown an increasing inclination to throw off their old subservience to English prose and example. If only by the force of numbers, they are bound to exert a dominant influence upon the course of the common language hereafter."

GLENN CRITTON.
1802 Ford Parkway, St Paul, Minn; 55116.

in the editor" is continued overleaf

Among this week's contributors

GERALD ABRAHAM'S *The Concise Oxford History of Music* was published last year.

FLEUR AUCCOCK's most recent volume of poems, *The Inner Harbour*, was published in 1979.

JUNE BADEN is the author of *The Skender Tree: a Life of Alice Meynell*, 1981.

HAROLD BEAVER is Reader in American Literature at the University of Warwick.

LORD BLAKE is Provost of The Queen's College, Oxford. His recent books include *The Conservative Opportunity*, 1976, and *A History of Rhodesia*, 1977.

MICHAEL BUTLER is Senior Lecturer in German at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *The Novels of Max Frisch*, 1976.

JAMES CAMPBELL is the editor of the *New Edinburgh Review*.

F. L. CARSTEN'S books include *The Fascist Movement in Austria*, 1977.

CHARLES CAUSLEY'S *Collected Poems 1931-1975* was published in 1975.

TEARNE CAVE is the author of *The Cornucopia Text*, 1979.

RICHARD COMBS is the editor of *Sight and Sound*.

MARTIN COOPER'S books include *Heaven: the Last Decade*, 1970.

EDWARD CRANKSHAW'S books include *The Habsburgs*, 1971, and *The Shadow of the Winter Palace: the Drift to Revolution 1825-1917*, 1976.

VALENTINE CUNNINGHAM is the editor of *The Penguin Book of Spanish Civil War Verse*, published in 1980.

GAVIN EWART'S *The Collected Ewart 1933-1980* was published last year.

STEPHEN FENDER'S *Flattening the Golden West* will be published by Cambridge University Press in the autumn.

JOHN GARDNER'S most recent book is *Before the Revolution*, 1978.

JAMES GRAHAM CAMPBELL is a lecturer in Medieval Archaeology at University College, London.

NORMAN HAMMOND is the editor of *Mesoamerican Archaeology*, 1975.

JULIE HANKEY'S theatre-historical edition of *Richard III* was published earlier this year.

DAVID HAWKES is a Research Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford. The third volume of his translation of *The Story of the Stone* by Cao Xueqin will be published later this month.

PHILIP THOMPSON'S books include *Roland Borlase: A Conservative Estimate*, 1977.

PETER VERDO is a lecturer in the History of Art at the University of Essex.

Men dry on fishy net (3,7,6)

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The novelist as father

By Edward Crankshaw

JOHN CONRAD:
Joseph Conrad: Times Remembered
218pp. Cambridge University Press.
£10.50.
0 521 22805 0

Here he is to the life, the small, compact, spruce-bearded, beautifully turned out foreign gentleman with the egg-shaped head and shoulders exaggeratedly high, a little stiff in his movements; the aristocratic Pole who had gone to sea to get away from the congenitally unaristocratic Russian conquerors; the master-mariner turned novelist, now presenting himself as the Kentish squire, neatly breeched, with highly polished boots and leather gaiters; finely mannered, but apt to snap, to bite even, under the stress of gout or an affront to his sense of the proper, or when his privacy was threatened; apt to disconcert the local ladies by kissing their hands at first meeting.

His greatest privacy was his writing. He did not like talking about that, or indeed about books of any kind, to the neighbours, to casual visitors, to pilgrims. In the intervals of cooking and housekeeping, Jessie, his wife, dutifully typed his manuscripts for him until the day when he could afford to pay someone else to do it, but she took no interest in what she was typing. It is somehow characteristic that much of his writing seems to have been done in the middle of the night when the household was asleep.

His family life was also private. He was never to be seen in all-pervasive by his close friends. But now, over fifty years after his death, we are taken some way into that life by his younger son John, himself in his seventies, a retired architect of Canterbury. His father called him Jack. He was nine years younger than his elder brother, Borys. But what Conrad felt or thought about Borys, who inevitably inhabited a different world from his brother, is not even touched upon; and there is equally no indication of what he felt or thought about the farmer's daughter whom he married in the early days of struggle, long before he had come to assert his divorce from the sea as absolute. This produces a rather odd emphasis at the centre of what is an exclusively domestic study. The son who clearly loved his father and was idolized by him, is loyal to his mother, who suffered for most of her married life from the consequences of incompetent surgery on her leg and was often in pain. There is sympathy for her in her affliction, but there are also one or two half-glances of what must surely have been often a fairly edgy state of affairs.

Thus, for example, the small boy had a passion for Meccano (that steadfast nursery delight only very recently, unbelievably, wiped off the face of the earth as though it had never been) and for model steam-engines. His father once committed the evidently hard-to-forgive mistake of bringing him back from a visit to London some delectable "accessories" for the elaboration and multiplication of Meccano models—but no present for Jessie: the small boy was uncomfortably aware of an angry whispering, and in a day or two there was a new broom from Ashford for Jessie, and thereafter no more Meccano or steam-engines for little Jack without "a trinket or a piece of jewellery" for Jessie. This was after fifteen or sixteen years of marriage, and the child was six or seven.

There is also a swift, almost imperceptibly fleeting shaft of bitterness when John Conrad reveals that after his father's death every book or manuscript or piece of paper with his signature or handwriting was sold—although the father had explained to the son that he was not going to give him copies of all his books because one day he would inherit his mother's inscribed copies.

There is very little more like that. But I think it is enough to bear in mind at least a partial explanation of Conrad's sometimes excessively defensive reserves—and also of his enchantment, here revealed for the first time,

with the childish pursuits and the companionship of a small son who clearly had the sunniest and most outgoing of natures.

If Jack worshipped his father, it is also clear that his father felt closer to him than to anybody else, finding in him from a very early age the sort of easy companionship he most lacked. Perhaps only with Jack could he forget the harsh complexities of human nature, the continuous struggle with the sense of failure. Borys, though much older than Jack, was more difficult; Jessie was hard to relax with and also (as John Conrad makes unmistakably clear) liable to exhibit jealousy when her husband's guests showed themselves more interested in him than in her. But Jack seems to have been open and unquestioning, happiest out of doors, eager to be helped with his ever-increasing home-made fleet by his ex-sailor father, eager to gather all he could about that father's past life. Thus it was a revelation when at last Conrad took him sailing in a real boat, out from Deal, to discover not only the admiration and respect in which that father was held but also the instant transformation of a stiffly moving, guttural head of family into an active seaman nipping up the heaving ladder on a visit in the Gull lightship, crippled hands and feet forgotten, the years shed like wrinkled skin—twenty years clear! liable to sea except for a brief moment on a "Q" ship during the 1914 war. There is more in these last pages than in all the rest of the book about the power of the man with his remarkable ability to make others look up to him.

This is natural enough. We are in the last phase of Conrad's life and the child observer has become a schoolboy. The pity is that he was away at school,

except for holidays, from the age of nine until his father died nine years later. This is one of the reasons why the mixture is rather thin, and why some questions remain unanswered. But it is not the only reason: John Conrad has his own ideas about what should and should not be revealed.

In fact his unassuming narrative contains a good deal more than immediately leaps to the eye. The general effect is one of quiet illumination; the book has to be taken at its own pace. It is not until one abandons certain hopes as irrelevant that the book declares its special charm. It is no good looking in it for the artist. John Conrad makes it clear that, for the best of reasons, he is not concerned with his father's genius (he is far too polite to use that word). He does, however, very engagingly flesh out the Conrad of the letters, of *A Personal Record*, of the formal biographies.

John Conrad was born in 1906. His father was then already famous and beginning to emerge from the darkest years of struggle. *Nostromo*, published two years earlier, had all but killed him, and another four years were to go before he could begin to feel safe in a material sense, though he had *Lord Jim*, *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and *The Secret Agent* all behind him. The first best-seller was *Chance* (I see from my own copy, dated January 27, 1914, that it was the fourth reprint in twelve days). But at least from 1910 onwards the household was comfortable.

It was then that the boy started taking notice, then too that the family moved from Aldington over Romney Marsh ("this poky little hole . . . four tiny rooms in half a cottage"), to quote Conrad himself to William Rothstein towards the end of 1909) to the moated farmhouse at Capel. This was

indeed an improvement—minimal services, but room to swing a cat, and to put up guests. They had a car, too, and a chauffeur-handyman. You had to be something of an automotive enthusiast to run a car in those days, and either comfortably off or a little recklessly living on the edge of or just beyond your means—as I think Conrad must have been living even then, with the faithful and extremely comfortably off J.B. Pinker to fall back on. But the desperate days were over; only the agony of creation remained. Great figures moved in and out, applauding—Wells and James, Galsworthy and Crane, Cunningham Graham, Kipling, Norman Douglas (who nearly expired in a high fever at Capel, though Mr Conrad seems to have been unaware of the crisis)—and, of course, Edward Garnett with his funny frog face and almost perfect absence of humour, the beginning and foundation of Conrad's ultimate success. Also Ford Madox Hueffer, still not quarrelled with, though meaning much less in Conrad's life than he had done in worse days. Fame and adulation, respect, too, he had indeed achieved; but not yet solid prosperity.

And then, immediately after the 1914 war, came a much grander house: Oswalds, at Bisphopbourne near Canterbury; pleasing to look at in its cool, Georgian way; less comfortable, John Conrad tells us, to live in than one might think; but a seal of mild affluence even in those days. Certainly rents were minimal and wages a disgrace, but even so, you could not run two gardeners and a chauffeur out of doors, and indoors a valet/butler, a cook, two housemaids and extra help from the village for entertaining—to say nothing of a fine Cadillac—without qualifying as a serious citizen.

This was a big step up from Capel, where most of John Conrad's childhood was spent, and a very big leap looked for a time as though this superb genius might be broken. What I miss in the narrative is any sense of the atmosphere of strain and doom about that household, which must have been insipid to a degree as the novelist wrestled to clarify his images and his livelihood in return for them; or the intermittent euphoria, the sort of still in the house, that must have been apparent when a book was at last finished and delivered, or a shining motor-car came booming up to replace a second-rattler. We are refreshed by the charming and innocent commerce of father and small son, the relaxed conversations with the village blacksmith, the occasional asperities to wards importunate or foolish visitors; the motor-car rides; the visits to Dispe; the great trip to Poland as war was breaking out all over Europe; the chess games. But we have to supply the tension for ourselves. What was papa's mood when, badly stuck in a novel, he would haul the small boy out of bed in the middle of the night to finish off a game of chess, and perhaps play another? We are not told.

Poor Ford gets it in the neck as usual (he asked for it, of course, and in his particular case he did not like Mr Conrad and she did not like him); but the irony here is that these stills childhood memories bring out more clearly than elsewhere those aspects of Conrad which Ford and Ford alone, all his nonsense notwithstanding, knew how to recreate, using elaborate artifice in *A Personal Remembrance* to paint a picture the essential simplicity of which matches John Conrad's image in its radiance while, at the same time, exploring the depths.

Trying to be American

By Harold Beaver

CHARLES C. ALEXANDER:
Here the Country Lies
Nationalism and the Arts in Twentieth-Century America
336pp. Indiana University Press, distributed by International Book Distributors, £19.50.
0 253 15544 4

Alfred Steiglitz liked to reminisce that during his student days in Europe in the 1880s he had seen in the streets many wagon-hitched stallions, with swaying penises exposed to anyone who happened to look. "In New York", Steiglitz pointed out, "such a thing would not be permitted. All the horses in the city are geldings". So in 1923 he photographed the underside of a gelding on a Manhattan street and called the picture "Spiritual America".

That gesture epitomized the 1920s. But, even twenty years earlier, Henry Adams had meditated:

The force of the Virgin was still felt at Lourdes, and seemed to be as potent as X-rays; but in America neither Venus nor Virgin ever had value as force—at most as sentiment. . . . For evidently America was ashamed of her, and she was ashamed of herself, otherwise they would not have strewn fig-leaves so profusely all over her.

Only Walt Whitman, as far as he could judge, "had ever insisted on the power of sex". But then Adams, obviously, was still ignorant of Melville. Perverse American literature might be—but not gelded. Sexual awareness itself has been a sign of emancipation from Europe. It was the recovery after the First World War of such spiritually potent ancestors as Melville and Thoreau and Emily Dickinson that constitutes the "American Renaissance". F.O. Matthiessen, oddly enough, was to borrow the phrase for his magisterial *Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941), backdating its range from the 1810s to the 1840s. For it was the "Young America" movement of the 1840s that first declared its aesthetic and intellectual independence from Europe. But it was the so-called "Lost Generation" of the 1920s that first took mood and conscious possession of that inheritance.

Retrieval was rapid and can be traced from D.H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (1923), to William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain* (1925), to Vee Wyck Brooks, *Emerson and Others* (1927), to Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (1929). That year the quarterly *American Literature* made its appearance, declaring: "Within the last five years American scholars have awakened to the fact that our literary history supplies a rich and comparatively unworked field". The following year Sinclair Lewis became the first American writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize.

Literary nationalism, then, was not a brocade from the twentieth century. It was Emerson, in his Phi Beta Kappa address at Harvard in 1837, who fired the shot heard round the world: "Our day of dependence; our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands; draws to a close. The millions that around us are rushing into life cannot always be fed on the starchy paste of foreign harvests. Events, actions, ideas, that must be born of this soil, that will stir themselves, so much for the Edinburgh Review. So much for Sydney Smith's rhetoric! "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture? or statue? To which Melville would make the resounding reply: "Give me my friends, that Shakespeare, as this day being born on the banks of the Ohio. And the day will come when you shall say, 'What a book by an Englishman that is a modern'".

By 1920 that prophecy seemed likely to be fulfilled. For whatever thunder broke from the *New Republic*, it was no longer a question of aesthetic independence from anybody. That verdict had been declared and was to drag on, as a condition, it was a matter of American style. Pound, Eliot,

Hemingway, Edmund Wilson, Gertrude Stein and Wallace Stevens learning the delights of the *eastern* frontier, with a dual perspective on both America and Europe; of planting their own vernacular undefeetably on the map of Europe; and instructing Europeans in the international entanglements of their own heritage.

The key question, Charles C. Alexander thinks, is "when and how the United States might come to have its own definable national culture". The answer, it might be thought, is obvious enough in terms of Lexington and Yankee Doodle, of Cabots and Lowells, the bean and the cod. It was to extend such mythologies that William Carlos Williams (in *In the American Grain*) linked Columbus to Cortez to Cotton Mather to Aaron Burr to Franklin to Washington to Lincoln to Daniel Boone. When processed in the popular media—Hollywood and westerns—such myths were to have their

broadest and most abiding impact; and it was in the critical absorption of popular culture that modern American art was born. Anton Dvorak in 1895 had insisted it should be, calling on American composers to use native folk songs. Besides "plantation melodies and slave song", Dvorak suggested the possibilities in Indian chants, New Orleans creole songs and dances, and "the plaintive ditties of the homesick German or Norwegian", the composer should listen to whistling boys, to street singers, to organ grinders. Because the best music lies "hidden among all the races that are co-mingled in this country". Such, for all the variety of their talent, was to be the extraordinary achievement of Sherwood Anderson, e.e. cummings, Eugene O'Neill, Scott Fitzgerald, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, Charles Ives, Aaron Copland, Nathaniel West and Frank Lloyd Wright; their achievement remains generative to this day.

Professor Alexander's own answer to his question, however, is curiously ghostly and insecure. He takes at face value the explicit statements of people like the composer Aaron Copland, the novelist Thomas Wolfe, or the painter Thomas Hart Benton that they wanted to speak artistically as Americans and to Americans, to capture the spirit and pulse of the national life. . . . I offer no judgments about the extent to which somebody succeeded or fell short of his or her effort to express America or to help create an American art. The point is that being American was vitally important to a great number of people in the arts during the first four decades of the century. That quality of being—or trying to be—is what this book finally is about.

That does not sound very promising. For the great intellectual movements, which allowed Americans to be so self-consciously American, were inevitably European movements, imported to the United States under contract to Freudianism, Marxism, symbolism, cubism, atomism, existentialism; structuralism, or perhaps merely the garden suburb movement or town planning. As Malcolm Cowley recorded in *Exile's Return* (1934): "An idea was a product manufactured under a European patent; all we could furnish toward them was raw talent. In everything, he remembered, every department of the cultural life, Europe offered the models to imitate. In painting, composing, philosophy, folk music, drinking, the drama, sex, politics, national consciousness. . . . Like their seventeenth-century predecessors, twentieth-century nationalists were still dancing their cultural jig to a largely European measure."

Whether that dependency, after the

First World War, was still to be called "colonial" or (as Harriet Monroe preferred) "provincial", hardly matters. What was needed, as Randolph Bourne recognized in 1918, was the "desperate spiritual outlaw with the 'just to create'". What mattered was an independent American use of its own source materials and myths (as Emerson and Whitman and Dvorak had claimed); with an independent American development of European forms and examples (as Cooper and Hawthorne and Henry James had shown). Nationalism in itself had little to do with it. It could equally be (as in Germany or Russia) a programme for disaster. The time had come, announced Harold Loeb's *Broom from Berlin* in 1922, "to recognize a national art as profoundly American as Baseball, The Jazz Band, The Cinema, and the Dirty Skyscraper". But the mere use of a motif from baseball or jazz or Walt Disney or drugstores ensured

nothing. State intervention, by means of the Public Works of Art Project, in itself ensured nothing either. How many of those celebrated murals are still to be seen? Let alone admired? Reviewing the work of the Federal Writers' Project up to 1937, Lewis Mumford was certain that "more public good has come out of the bankruptcy of the economic order than ever came regularly out of its flunkey prosperity". In retrospect that seems doubtful. What counted even in the 1930s—perhaps especially in the 1930s—was the self-conviction need to test and challenge orthodoxy, whether foreign or native-based, by an open, critical, miscellaneous discourse which is the "truth" of art. This might turn out to be *The Day of the Locust*, or *Light in August*, or, for that matter, *Porgy and Bess*.

Towering talents, like those of Mel-

ville or Henry James, could sustain such a discourse almost single-handed; they could develop it out of their own critical resources. Though some had first to go abroad and for most the new programmes needed spelling out. "Before we have an American literature," James Russell Lowell had long ago urged, "we must have an American criticism." It is this that the interned, nationalist mood of the 1920s and 1930s provided.

Men like Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright had been sustained by the example of Whitman. His was the "word Democratic, the word En-Masse"; his the path to the liberation of body and spirit. Wright admired Thoreau's individualism even more; as did Steiglitz who, Viennese-style, founded the Photo-Secession. But equally sustaining was the spread of new magazines: the *New Republic* in 1914, *Seven Arts* in 1916, followed by the *Dial*, the *American Mercury* and countless more. New York increasingly came to be the broker of the modern; and in New York it was often Jews who controlled these magazines: Steiglitz himself, Walter Lippmann, Walter Weyl, Paul Rosenfeld, George Jean Nathan, James Oppenheim, Wildo Frank, "A Jew without Judaism, an American without America", Frank once described himself. A burning need for aesthetic and intellectual transcendence was turned by these renegades to the idea of America. A national awakening, a national renaissance was evoked, worthy of their idealism. All could agree on one thing: that America, whatever else it might be, was not "Anglo-Saxon".

This alone helped to dispose of that querulous old bugbear, literary anglophilia. So many of these new boys had spoken German or Yiddish at home. For some, like Lionel Trilling, England might hold a special attraction. For others it was irrelevant; and when they made for Europe, it was the Europe of Berlin and Paris and Rome. But especially Paris. Pound's move from London to Paris in 1920 was to be decisive. Paris was to be the capital of what Pound called, with typical bluster, the "American Risorgimento".

But the "Renaissance" was not confined to Paris, Chicago or Greenwich Village. It was its manifold facets that made it a "Renaissance". There was

nothing like the ambassador's response to the discovery that the Russians are very likely to bug the embassy: " . . . I say nothing outside the Kremlin about Russia that I wouldn't say to Stalin's face. . . . I'm hear. We'll be friends that much faster."

In the context of this Russo-American lovefest, even allies like the British and French appear devout and class-bound, unprepared to take the excursion around Soviet factories that gave Davies his really first-hand, and truly empirical, incomprehension of Russian realities. The building of historical personalities which this sentimental humanism can produce far outdoes anything that could be imagined by more cynical mean-mindedness. The original screenplay included a scene, but from the final print, in which a disappointed Trotsky confronts a contemptuous Mr Ribbentrop in the German Embassy in Gales. (The introduction by David Cubert, otherwise apparently exact, refers to this as an encounter between Trotsky and Hitler which is, alas, too good to be true.) All of these men are no more than evil power-seekers. They understand the goodness of the people as little as more American politicians can fathom the far-flighted wisdom of leaders like Stalin and Roosevelt.

I think we have much in common, Mrs Davies.

That is a very nice compliment.

MADAME MOLOTOV: Perhaps some day we shall all speak the same language.

Making friends with Stalin

By Kenneth Minogue

DAVID CUBERT (Editor):
Mission to Moscow
277pp. University of Wisconsin Press, £2.50.
0 299 08384 5

Readers on the wrong side of fifty may remember the film *Mission to Moscow* as a piece of patriotic nonsense, which displayed Bukharin, Khrushchev and the other defendants in the Russian purge trials of 1936-38 as a band of Quakers in league with Nazi Germany. Made by Warner Brothers in late 1942-43, it was archetypal communist propaganda, and one of the amusements of this volume is as appendix show the miserable Jack Warner squirming evasively before a House Un-American Activities Committee. Yet the whole thing appears to have been created out of an ambassador's vanity and pure American patriotism. No communist in sight. It reminds one of Humbert Wolfe's couplet about how it is impossible, but also unnecessary, to corrupt the British journalist.

This volume is one of a series of screenplays to emerge from the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Each has a full scholarly apparatus: Warner Brothers have donated the Warner Film Library and a lot of files to the Center; and volumes are pointing out, ranging from *The Adventures of Robin Hood* to *New Voyage* and *A Midsummer*

Warlike governments are often keen to stir up some patriotic emotion, but it's seldom that they go to the lengths of turning history entirely topsy-turvy. This is what Joseph Davies managed to do. A millionaire businessman sent to Moscow as US ambassador by President Roosevelt in 1936, he was described much later by the producer of the film as "a pompous, conceited, arrogant man with greater political ambitions than his abilities justified".

There's not much arguing with that on the basis of what is here revealed. But the more interesting point is the way in which the folly of Davies is rooted in common American attitudes as they emerge in the sentimentality of the Hollywood film. *Mission to Moscow* is a historical pageant that reveals how lovable the people are if only they can overcome the misunderstandings which have usually been invented by evil people. Consider Mrs Davies talking to Madame Molotov:

MADAME MOLOTOV (with deep sincerity): I think we have much in common, Mrs Davies.

MRS DAVIES:

That is a very nice compliment.

MADAME MOLOTOV: Perhaps some day we shall all speak the same language.

the "Harlem Renaissance"; the craft revival, signalled by the opening of the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan in 1931; the rediscovery of Lincoln and Jefferson, whose hellenic shrines in Washington were built in these decades; the recovery of the language itself, whose monument became H.L. Mencken's *The American Language* (first published in 1919). The depression years reconciled most expatriates to their homeland, despite all its abuses. As Van Wyck Brooks was to write: "our prosaic republic seemed curiously inculpable beside Mussolini's Italy or Germany or Spain". While for those further left, the survival of America depended on the "Europeanization" of its culture. That was the message from the *Port-au-Prince Review*, originally an organ of the John Reed Club of New York, the Communist Party's Manhattan affiliate. By the time its editorial board split, in 1936, on the issue of Stalinist denunciation of Trotsky, Lowell's demand for American criticism had been more than fulfilled. With the advent of the New Critics, the unimaginable was about to happen: of American criticism overtaking and submerging American literature altogether.

Charles C. Alexander is a historian, not a literary man. The strength of his guide is that it presents a whole cross-section of the arts: painting, architecture, sculpture, music, drama. His potted history neatly dovetails major figures and movements with bits of gossip thrown in. "Dark-fellied, not really handsome, but well-dressed and engaging" begins a typical sentence on George Gershwin, linking the *Rhapsody in Blue* to the Concerto in F. The book can be recommended as a reliable tool, a handy companion to Henry F. May's *The End of American Innocence* (1959). But as a due to nationalism in the arts, *Here the Country Lies* is as vague and unsatisfactory as its title. By insisting on 1900 as its date-line and on gentility as an opening move, it obscures all the tensions of the American *fin de siècle*. The initial paragraphs glow with imperial sunrise. Yet the generation of the 1920s in its formal obsessions and that of the 1930s in its social commitments owed far more to the generation of their fathers and grandfathers than the textbook's insistence on new beginnings cares to admit.

The poet as politician

By F. S. L. Lyons

ELIZABETH CULLINGFORD:
Yeats, Ireland and Fascism
251pp. Macmillan, £15.
0 333 26199 2

This is an excellent book, but one whose title does it less than justice. It is indeed concerned with the vexed question of Yeats's connection with Fascism, but this episode accounts for no more than the last forty pages. Elizabeth Cullingford's real purpose is braver and more comprehensive; to look at Yeats's nationalism as well as his Fascist record. More specifically, her purpose is to challenge the thesis advanced sixteen years ago by Conor Cruise O'Brien in a famous essay, "Fascism and Cullingford". The thesis, as Dr Cullingford summarizes it, was that "while Yeats was a self-interest, half-hearted and intermittent nationalist, he was an ardent and early Fascist". The case, presented by Dr Cruise O'Brien with typical panache, was a tour de force of special pleading, but although it has been challenged from time to time, it has been, and still is, influential in shaping the views of those who don't know enough about either Yeats or

Ireland to realize that it is but one of several possible interpretations.

Dr Cullingford traces painstakingly the origins and development of Yeats's career as a nationalist which, she would maintain, was for him no pose but a lifelong commitment. She has not much difficulty in establishing this for the early Yeats and only a little more in establishing it for the later Yeats, though she is, I think, on less firm ground when dealing with the period between the 1907 riots over the first production of *The Playboy of the Western World* and the Easter Rising of 1916. Yeats experienced a marked recoil from Ireland at that time and his closest friend, Lady Gregory, set only noticed it, but was for a while anxious lest it might become permanent. And even though the Easter Rising reawakened his nationalism, as was not until 1922, inauspicious year of civil war, that the poet took his momentous decision to return home and, in part at least, to remake his life in the service of his country.

Dr Cullingford's book draws together the various strands that made up Yeats's nationalism more deftly than any other I have read. But the lady does explain too much. To reduce Yeats, even in his political role, to a series of elementary propositions is like trying to analyse the

rainbow—it can be done but it misses the main point. And the main point about Yeats is surely the variousness and complexity which flowed into his work so that that work transcended time and place even when deeply affected by both.

By emphasizing the continuity of Yeats's nationalism, Dr Cullingford anchors him rather too firmly to Dublin and in so doing underestimates the counter-attraction of London. To interpret any Anglo-Irish writer simply, or even primarily, in terms of an allegiance is to misunderstand the whole Anglo-Irish condition, which is to appear excessively Irish when in England and deplorably English when in Ireland. That may seem an unhappy fate, but when it produces—as it did in the work of Yeats and Synge and Lady Gregory—what the poet called that "aesthetic, cold, explosive, dawning impartiality", then it allows the writer, however involved he may appear to be, to hold back from his material with a detachment which gives him at his best the characteristic Anglo-Irish astuteness.

But if Dr Cullingford to some extent over-simplifies Yeats, she can still tell us a great deal, especially about the sources of his nationalism. Moreover, in her duel with Cruise O'Brien, though she does not eclipse him (who can?), she often has the best of it because of her superior knowledge and objectivity. Thus, she can show that Yeats was much more sympathetic to the Dublin working class than appears in the Cruise O'Brien essay, that he was a more liberal and independent senator than his "corrosive" title would allow him to be, and that he did not, as Cruise O'Brien suggests, break off his flirtation with Fascism when the Irish version of it, the "Blueshirt" movement, was a spent force, but, on the contrary, when that movement was at its height and when an ambitious poet might still have been regarding it as the new wave of the future.

On the question of the Fascist connection itself she is sensible and effective. She does not attempt to deny that the connection existed—more fully it did. However, she points out not only the obvious fact that Fascism

before the rise of Hitler was not the term of indiscriminate abuse it has since become, but also that Yeats's involvement with both brief and highly individual, not to say idiosyncratic, had little to do with the actualities of European politics (though it was influenced by the lethal potentialities of Irish politics), but a great deal to do with his preoccupation with public order and his "aristocratic" concept of "the deification of the educated classes". It took very little direct contact with the Blueshirts and their leader, General O'Duffy, to demonstrate to the editor the despotism of from, it would not be found in that quarter. The episode closed, therefore, in an atmosphere not of high tragedy but of broad farce.

Dr Cullingford ends as she began by establishing that Yeats ended as he began, as "a nationalist of the school of John O'Leary, the indefatigable old Fenian who dreamed indeed of breaking the English connection, but who also believed that 'there are certain things a man must not do to save a nation'—in effect, the sort of things which are now being done by the Provisional IRA. Yeats was twenty when he first met the veteran patriot and O'Leary's high-spirited (though admittedly not very patriotic) Irish nationalism stamped him for life. It is rather too much to deduce from that, as Dr Cullingford does in her conclusion, that Yeats was "essentially and incidentally a political writer". This is a partial truth. He was certainly a political writer, but he was always so much more besides, and Dr Cullingford herself recognizes this when she cites the poem "Politics", which, written in old age, puts the whole public clangour into its proper perspective:

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian,
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought,
And knows what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms.
But O that I were young again
And held the limy arm!

John Mole

Hear no-Evil spoke it nevertheless

At conference which were well-attended.

See no-Evil willed the tip of his hair-point.

It made black crosses against names he'd never heard of.

Speak no-Evil praised his silent measures.

Mute appellation, the essence of a name.

Tha fourth wept. It was the shortest verse in the Bible.

He had witnessed the descent of man and wept.

The limits of dictatorship

By F.L. Carsten

GERHARD HIRSCHFELD and LOTHAR KETTENACKER (Editors)

Der "Führerstaat": Mythos und Realität
Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reiches
465pp. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta. DM48.

Hitler and the policies of the Third Reich continue to fascinate the historians in Germany as well as in the English-speaking world, and the mountain of literature concerned with these topics is forever growing. In Germany, two rival historical schools have emerged. The one continues to emphasize the importance of the dictator on whose ultimate decision all depended and who continued to impose his will on Germany and German-occupied Europe to the bitter end. The other, while not denying Hitler's importance, gives priority to the "objective" factors, especially social and economic ones, which enabled him to establish and maintain himself in power. It sees the Third Reich as a "polycracy" of rival and competing elements, with a Hitler often hesitant to take decisions or simply not interested in matters of administration and detail. In its view, the internal conditions of Germany during the war years became increasingly chaotic, as new agencies competed for influence with the older ones, new "special plenipotentiaries" usurped power, and Hitler proved unable to control the ghosts he had called into being.

for plunder, the growing economic crisis in Germany and the exhaustion of her resources. He also points to the growing "fragmentation of decision-making processes", the disintegration of government into ill-coordinated special agencies, often busy fighting each other, which gradually replaced the more orderly forms of administration. In this reviewer's opinion, both interpretations have much in their favour; there is no glaring contradiction between them. In certain fields, Hitler continued to enforce his will: as proved by his daily conferences on the military situation, his direction of military campaigns and even the conduct of battles (from afar), where his stream of orders delivered by radio considerably helped the Allies who could decipher them. In internal affairs, on the other hand, Hitler lost touch and interest the longer the war lasted and lost matters to his "plenipotentiaries", but this was not the case at the beginning of his rule. The Third Reich from beginning to end would have looked very different without him. Only future research will elucidate Hitler's precise role outside the fields of foreign policy and military decision-taking.

These controversial papers are followed by those dealing with specific aspects of the regime. Lothar Kettenacker asks the very pertinent questions: why did the large majority of the Germans identify with the "Austrian demagogue", and what mass mentality made the "Hitler myth" possible? His answer is the Hitler's slogans and speeches, his petty-bourgeois prejudices, were tailored to the non-political, naive elements of ordinary Germans, that

Hitler was "made from the same clay", that he often gave them paternalistic advice on questions of everyday life. Germans were of course accustomed to look up to father figures, but they the old Emperor William I, or Bismarck, or Field-marshal von Hindenburg. After von Hindenburg's death in 1934, many no doubt transferred these feelings to the "Führer", who promised them a strong, united Germany and a glorious future.

On a similar topic Ian Kershaw, discussing "The Führer Image and Political Integration", on the basis of detailed research in Bavaria, finds a clear dichotomy between the image of the National Socialist Party and that of Hitler. While the former often had an essentially negative image (eg, because of its attacks on the churches), Hitler stood "above the humdrum of normal affairs", looked after the needs of the nation and was even considered (until 1939) "a man of peace". Massive support for him continued after the outbreak of war, and Kershaw estimates that perhaps 80 per cent of the Germans followed Hitler. Before the war ended I asked a Medical Officer in the German Army, an old Communist, how many Germans supported Hitler at the height of his success, and he replied unhesitatingly, "75 per cent". The two estimates are very similar.

Several essays discuss, from very different aspects, the role of the elites in the regime. Milan Hauer, in "The Professional and the Amateur in National Socialist Foreign Policy", stresses that in the *Auswärtige Amt* and the ranks of German diplomats there were hardly

any changes of personnel, that Ribbentrop's appointment to London in 1936 and foreign minister in 1938 were the first departures from that rule, and that even under him the *Auswärtige Amt* continued to be dominated by the old professional. They were engaged in bitter conflicts with various National Socialist agencies which tried to conduct foreign policy, in particular in the Near and Middle East, but without any conspicuous success. In its turn many members of the old élite—the nobility and army officers—penetrated the ranks of the SS, as Günner Bochnart shows in "The Jurists in the SS-Führerkorps". By 1938 about 14 per cent of the SS generals were members of the old nobility; the percentage can hardly have been much higher in the general population was only about 0.14 per cent. Like Frölich, in a paper "The Party on the Local Level", demonstrates that after 1933 the better-situated people—farmers as well as middle class—joined the Party, which before had often been distinctly lower class in its local composition. In the Bavarian villages investigated by her the local leaders of the Peasant League, usually well-to-do farmers, simply changed sides. This interpenetration of the old and the new is an interesting aspect of the Third Reich which merits further investigation, on the local, provincial and national levels. The old élites thus hoped to preserve their influence, but to what extent were they successful? In the case of the SS, they surely failed in their attempt to influence its goals and activities.

Two essays discuss the functions and role of the mayors of large German cities. Host Materna establishes that the large majority of those appointed in 1933—nearly 75 per cent—had joined the Party before Hitler became chancellor. The other words, these were loyalists given to "meritorious" old members. But there were frequent changes of personnel and many were forced out soon. As Jeremy Noles shows in a paper on "City Government between Party and State", the new mayors clashed only too often with the powerful *Gauverwalter* who had been entrenched in their posts since the early days of National Socialism. These trusted "old comrades" possessed a direct line to Hitler, who remained loyal to them and backed them in case of conflict—and the errand mayor had, no option but to quit. In this field, too, Hitler's power of intervention must not be underestimated. That he did not always use it is a different matter. In the last essay Peter Hüttenberger gives a fascinating case in which a long-drawn-out and bitter conflict between the medically qualified head surgeon and the more "domestic" was submitted to Hitler for decision. But he remained silent and refused to take sides, and the conflict was finally settled by a compromise.

These essays show how much more research remains to be done on different aspects of National Socialist rule, and how strong the differences often were between the claims and the reality of the Third Reich. It is well worth publishing them—though unfortunately we are not given the often extremely lively discussions which followed the papers.

The inspiration of instability

By Michael Butler

RONALD TAYLOR:
Literature and Society in Germany 1918-1945
363pp. Brighton: Harvester. £22.
0 85527 898 6

For the scholar wishing to establish a coherent relationship between literature and society there can be no more demanding periods than the one Ronald Taylor tackles in this book. The years between the foundation of the Weimar Republic and the collapse of the Third Reich are marked by chronic social and political instability on the one hand and an incredibly rich profusion of cultural activity on the other. Faced with such an apparent paradox, the author is well aware of the twin dangers that threaten his enterprise: the

reduction of history to "background" and the relegation of imaginative literature to the level of social document. The latter is the more indolently tempting. For it is often the third-ratio or even trivial writer who is the most "typical" of his time, while a major work of the imagination is inevitably distorted if it is used solely to illustrate a sociological analysis.

Taylor divides his study into two sections—1918-1933 and 1933-1945—and begins each with a detailed historical survey. He thereby highlights the central socio-political and economic issues before examining the varied literary responses they have evoked in drama, poetry and the novel. The method is not entirely successful, however. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the study of literature and society can be effectively integrated without a theoretical framework embracing both. The author's empirical approach works well enough in the drive of historical

narrative, carried along as it is on a basis of well-documented fact and sources, but a similar pace in covering a very large number of minor and major literary figures, far from integrating them into the social fabric, is more likely to leave the reader breathless and with an impression of bitulities.

The brief discussion of two aftermath of Expressionism, for example, does not do justice to that movement's complex achievements, nor does the literary emphasis allow a proper assessment of the Bauhaus's significant contribution to German culture in this period. A perceptive feature of German public life is neatly expressed as the tendency to "convert a socio-political issue into a metaphysical exercise", but the important argument that the peculiar élan of Stefan George or of Ernst Jünger and the nihilism of Gottfried Benn prepared the ground for National Socialism needs more rigorous analysis than it receives here. A sharper compression leads to bold but often conventional discussions of such major writers as Kafka, Thomas Mann, Heidegger, Brecht, Döblin and Broch. But just what gives their work an autonomous value beyond the immediate social environment is never made clear—they simply have "the timelessness of great art". Perhaps Walter Benjamin, recognized as a "challenging personality", could have helped here, but he is only given a single tantalizing paragraph.

Nevertheless, Taylor's book does tell a fascinating, at times horrifying, story. By judicious use of memoir, diaries and autobiographies, from such humane representative intellectuals as Harry Graf Kessler, Stefan Zweig and Carl Zuckmayer, the author is able to complement the evidence of purely literary texts and convey something of the lived reality. The salutary point is driven home that neither intellectual nor poetic imagination gave automatic immunity from the virus of Nazism.

The most successful pages of the book, in fact, document society and culture in Hitler's Germany. In the first six years of Nazi dictatorship over two thousand writers emigrated, along with thousands of actors, musicians, artists,

scientists and scholars—an intellectual exodus without parallel in the history of modern Europe. Before the 1930s writers were sealed, a quarter of a million people, including half the Jewish population, had left, bringing with them (in Roman Rolland's words) "everything of that Germany which we love and respect". Taylor's description of how the Nazis created their own canon of literature is chillingly instructive. At schools and universities offered little concerted resistance, party leaders and professors alike hurried to rewrite German cultural tradition. By means of ruthless selection and willful distortion, Hölderlin, Schiller, Kleist, Heidegger, Novalis were all cut and shaped to fit into the ideology of the master race. Goethe and Lessing proved more difficult to assimilate, but Heine, of course, was promptly consigned to the bin.

This shabby and disgraceful episode is related with admirable restraint, and gives a depth of focus to Ronald Taylor's subsequent discussion of those writers like Carossa, Jünger and Benn who made their individual accommodation with the regime. The author also accurately portrays the loneliness, poverty and depression of those who emigrated, cut off as they were from their public and livelihood and above all from their linguistic and cultural roots. The resilience and creative good fortune of Brecht and Mann and the fate of such as Ernst Toller and the few German writers who actually dirtied their hands with practical politics. An all too brief mention of Marjorie Fleissner, who neither fled nor compromised, was duly forbidden to write at all after 1933, reminds the reader of a third category of writer, which complicates even further the dubious concept of "inner emigration".

If the historian needs to understand the artist's uniquely imaginative response to the life around him and the student of literature needs to grasp the social and political forces which help to shape his subject, this book will point the way in the right direction. It sometimes bewildering catalogues plays, poems and novels certainly indicates the fragility of twentieth-century German culture, and shows how swiftly the finest edifices of the mind can collapse.

Ron Butler

in a paper on "Monocracy or Polycracy?" Klaus Hildebrand stresses that Hitler's decision to go to war was caused solely by political, not economic, motives, that he dominated the field of foreign policy more visibly than the field of internal affairs, that his racist utopianism was "singular and not comparable" as was the whole of "Hitler's German dictatorship". In his opinion, Hitler's racistist policy differed in principle from Mussolini's policy of conquest which was traditionally imperialist, and therefore the term "fascism" as applied to Germany must be rejected. In contrast with Hildebrand, Hans Mommsen, discussing "Hitler's Position within the National Socialist System", considers him, in certain aspects, a "weak" dictator, often uncertain of himself, hesitant and strongly influenced by his entourage. Mommsen emphasizes the importance of the traditional German élites which, to a large extent, accepted the ideological premises of National Socialism—especially its fierce anti-Bolshevism—and Hitler's authority. Hitler's power was sacrosanct to them, and without their willing cooperation he could not have preserved it, nor could he have carried out his megalomaniac schemes.

Mommsen's interpretation is largely supported by Tim Mason in a paper on the "Current Controversy about the Interpretation of National Socialism". He maintains that "Hitler cannot be a full or adequate explanation" that for example the timing of the war was not due only to Hitler, but was "decisively influenced by the politico-economic need

Spring

(in imitation of the Chinese of Li Shang Yin)

We meet and we part, there leaping
and more pain, it is spring,
the little flowers fear blossoms
and the silk worm spins its silken
unlike it dies.

When you arrive I light the bedside candle.
Later, I watch you blind up your uncombed hair
as each strand is twisted tighter
into place, its colour darkens.
You must leave when the candle flame chokes in its way.

You could not come to me this evening.
The moon's light chills my room;
I sit alone, my heart is
a cold, I hope the oriole's love song
it is still spring.

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Calling a spade a shovel

By Grevel Lindop

VICTOR PRICE
Two Parts Water
63pp. Harry Chambers/Potterloo
Poets. £3.
0 905291 27 1

JOHN ASHBROOK
In the Footsteps of the Oplum Eater
62pp. Harry Chambers/Potterloo
Poets. £3.
0 905291 31 X

There's a solid consistency about the Potterloo Poets series that has its good and its bad sides. Design and printing are always excellent, and the poems themselves are never less than interesting, not least because they tend to be people who've already done some living and have something to say: there's no adolescent genius, but there are no under-graduate bores either. Instead, there's a preference for poems with a narrative line; Larkin's influence is conspicuous; conspicuous, too, is an avoidance of technical experiment and high-level philosophical or political perspectives. Sometimes, indeed, there's a rather dogged insistence on the viewpoint of the average person in an average-to-bad world, modestly offering average views in ordinary language: a most respectable strategy, but unlikely to lead to any outstanding achievement. Still, time will tell: all the recent Potterloo volumes have been first collections, and as far as I know none of the poets has yet brought out a second. There may be exciting developments in store.

Victor Price and John Ashbrook, the latest recruits to the series, share avowedly and a sharpness of observation that should take them a long way. Victor Price's *Two Parts Water* comes at you flitting, with the first line of the first poem:
Born to the harsh certainties
Of Ulster, where a spade's
A bloody shovel and you need to know
What foot to put to it, I came
To this mild park-land where
A settled culture had made me of
Though the same poem confesses a "love" for England and judges "I must have weathered, like the stones and trees, there is little sign of any weathering into a love for the fat men there". The English are described in poems with titles like "Organization

Man" and "Commuters" and seen mostly as stereotypes—some of them very worn stereotypes indeed: "The natty clerk, wasp-waisted in his suit (who) Dips his proboscis in the sporting pages—surely this is Lupin Potter, or a minor character from Gissing? The meagre best of these poems is 'Bristow', on the Frank Dickens cartoon character, which at least deals consistently in its popular clichés about business and saves itself by transforming them into weird metaphors. Bristow, "caged in pin-stripes... And bowler-hatted like a trombone", spends lunchtimes "hiding in the park/Behind a Weetabix mouse-tache".

But you can't base a criticism of modern society altogether on Bristow, and as an alternative Mr Price offers the doomed heroes of the fringe-cultures: his grandfather ("Henry"), an Ulster atheist who "wouldn't hurt a fly but mutilated/Catholic Truth Society tracts/With fierce annotations, scattering/Rubbish, Bosh and Damned Nonsense! And a small shot of exclamation marks", or a Lewis poet-cutter to whom Mr Price delivers what is meant as a Heaneyish compliment but sounds absurdly patronizing: "You're a neat slicer, man". There is also "Sorley" (Maclean), envied for living "in a world where time/had made no division between word and deed" and hearing "the phobos of the language of the Gael". Now we are in the realm of Ossian: a world no more real than Bristow's. Victor Price is trying to communicate something genuinely felt, but somewhere in the process has fallen into feeling what he thinks he ought to feel. There is a want of inward touch—the very thing he laments in "modern English culture".

That touch is found again in poems where he chooses a less ambitious subject, and one that permits close observation. "Yarrow" is vividly realized, a "ferry stranger" whose next head tossing, the white petals crinkly round blobs of golden breadcrumbs", and "Ladybird" comes off the page alive and startling:

The enamelled hemispheres
Hinge forward and up;
As from a glasses-case
A pair of crumpled wings
[Belonging, you'd think,
To a big solid midge]
Flop out and unfold.
With an untidy whirl
They lift their split burden
In sidelong flight, subject to wobble:
A helicopter with the rotor slipping.

At which point, one feels, the thing should have been left to go its own strange way, unlabelled. But Mr Price pins it, and the energy escapes: "Thus from mind's carapace/Inspiration emerges/Taking wing all right/But unsure of direction." There is similar pleasure and disappointment in "Judgement of Paris, National Gallery", where the naive unreality of the scene is delightfully drawn to a focus in the sheer embarrassment of Paris himself: "He holds the apple, more russet than gold/As though he wished it wasn't there. A peacock/Seems poised to bite him in the foot." Enough said. But no—"From this character", Mr Price reminds us, "There issued ten years of calamity"—and the poem vanishes like a spiked balloon. Mr Price needs to resist this tendency to bite his own excellent poems morally, as it were, in the foot, for several of them really are excellent. He has a sharp eye for the eerie oddity of things—"A dark angel garbed as daddy-long-legs/Nothing but wings and trailing filaments" who haunts the patient's bedchamber in "Anorexia", or the "red porridge" that "bubbles up and down" inside Elia's crater in "Empedocles". The philosopher, Price soberly calculates, could never have jumped far enough to reach "the small precise glow of the orifice", and would certainly have "Fetched up between two boulders half way down... A smeared bundle of philosophic doubt/slowly kipping in the brimstone fumes". There is a most unusual vision in some of these poems, and one would like to see it emerge unimpeded.

John Ashbrook brandishes De Quincey rather distractingly in his title, for although his early life contains a number of startling parallels with De Quincey's (minus, one gathers, the

opium), this fact has no essential relevance even to the title poem. Still, an autobiography from a boy, he wandered through Wales living on food/pulled from the earth, washed clean in streams/raw eggs I'd only learnt you could eat/seeing my father, on poor medical advice/thrashing whole yolks down his gullet." A sense of absurdity prevails:

I swam shoreward on Atlantic breakers,
crashed onto the body of a man.
They said I'd risked my life trying to save his.
offered five pounds, which I thought generous. I still believe
life may have some meaning
if only we live long enough to find it.

There is an appreciation of human oddities: "The Great Escapist" (in a poem dedicated "To Reggie Rubbo-Bones Wilson") "sits by the barometer solitary/Jeeps twisted three times round each other". "Saturday Night in Flinches" shows the well-intentioned poet trying to introduce two lonely bobs, "a tiny, dapper Scotsman/who

Abacadabra

By Gavin Ewart

THOMAS M. DISCH:
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRST
UVWXYZ
79pp. Avon Press Poetry. £3.25.
85466 073 7

This is the first collection by Thomas Disch to be published in Britain, and a question that quickly comes to mind is: do Americans habitually transpose O and P in their alphabet? Dictionaries and indexes suggest not. This fact, and the further fact that the first poem is an "Abecedary" ("A is an Apple, as everyone knows", says the last one, "Z is Zephyr"), suggests at once that we are in the presence of a poet of the John Updike, John Fuller or X. J. Kennedy kind—somebody, that is, who is not afraid to write what used to be called Light Verse, somebody with a games-playing mind and a lot of fun in the shop of poems, somebody, too, who is very accomplished at writing them.

Disch exploits science fiction and free verse, as well as traditional rhyme. Historical, unlikely might-have-beens ("The execution of Marianne Moore... T. S. Eliot raving for months in a Genoa hospital before he died"), Alvarez bashing his bicycle into an oak? his shoulders with standard SF Apocalypse ("A fire the bomb we'll gather sharp, and from the roses... Literary references are common (as private as the most familiar face disintegrating/poetically in the photo album at the back of the drawer/where the childhoods of Pooh and Christopher were kept apart"). There is also the kind of language we are used to reading in the poems of Peter Porter:

Try to sleep soundly
in the abandoned
casualty of our dream;
where nice monsters like the frog
in a Japanese horror
film swim ineffectually toward
this continent seems to provide for
of her two hundred million
resident aliens.

"Homage to the Carrack" is also Porterian. Some poems are full of quiet fun—the Browning monologue "D. W. Richmond Gives Directions to the Architect of His Tomb". Some have wit like "On The Disposal of My Body": "Burn it, or feed it to lions at the zoo/Or give it to some needy Neophyte. He'll know

insists on singing; (and) a red-faced man/hurly in long overcoat. Tailed policeman/or pensioned-off overweight rugby player". It doesn't work: "Soon it is quite clear/the lonely do not crave each other."

In "Strange Meeting" he encounters professionally a problem father, a foul-tempered, near-paranoid Pole who beats his children, and who believes that he has "suffered more from English snobbery/than in the prison camps of Germany". The verdict is refreshingly good and realistic: "I sink to hopelessness. The man's not as mad as I expected; he's sane as you or I. He's lived here thirty years/And still he hates us." In short, nothing to be done: an implied conclusion reached by many of Mr Ashbrook's poems. The best of them have the force of good short stories, the verse lending concentration and sometimes a harsh music. Not all of them work: like Victor Price, John Ashbrook at times goes ineffectually agnate "Futuretality", "Progress", "The Government Officers" and other demons we all love to hate, and in "The Ravens" he huffs and puffs, trying to impersonate Ted Hughes: "They are black as vicars. Black as doctors. Black as the Gestapo"; etc. But when he writes of people and their dreams, when he writes poems which with all their ruggedness continually stimulate our curiosity and compassion and (as so much contemporary poetry fails to do) keep us reading and reciting.

what to do." Some are straight metaphysical: Time "is the school where we pay attention to the inexorable and are made to write one hundred million times I must learn to obey." Some are like SF films—"The Growth of the Church" is like "The Incredible Shrinking Man"—and some have a touch of Auden: "It is possible to move/To a slightly nicer/Neighborhood. Or if not, then at least there is usually someone/To talk to, or a library/That stays open late." Some lines are pure surrealism: "A single owl was sealed inside each rook".

Weaknesses include a straying in and out of rhyme ("The Major Romanist Poet"), obviousness and ineffectiveness (such beauty, you say/Let us sleep & admire/A moment a day/The fields & the fire/God the great spirit/Had caught you again!), and melodrama ("His fingers still retained their grip, but not his will/His eyes were fixed on eyes transfixed by love"). Some poems aren't as good as their titles ("My Life, Considered as a Romantic Fiction", for example), and some are altogether too slight: "The Turtle's Dream", though well written, is based on nothing more substantial than the fact that "turtles" in old English meant a turtle dove. "Xenophonic Anabasis" is more effective, though that too is based on nothing more than the similarity of sound of "thalassa" (sea) and "thanatos" (death). "Notebooks of Exercises" (Cohers d'exercice?) is a slightly ponderous surrealist gloss on a piece of French overdescription—only slightly ponderous, but still ponderous.

The most formally satisfying poems are sometimes the most satisfying overall: "The Novel: A Sonnet", "The Politics of Darkness", another (unrhymed) sonnet.

And you wait who'll understand? The fore you feel, and the hate, and the sides of fear. Bitterness, too, seems to help Disch—"The Prisoner" is excellent a complaint (as I take it) that all Americans were thought, in England, to be responsible for the Vietnam War. An attitude mildly bitter also inspires "The Porterage". These are serious poems of great merit. The Vegetables' too, full of SF wit, proves that a poem can be slight and yet still maintain its mystery.

This is an outstanding book, and very enjoyable. British readers should not be deterred by the clatterous/venous rhyme on page 66. This pronunciation is a custom of the country.

John Ashbrook

